

WORD BANK SERIES

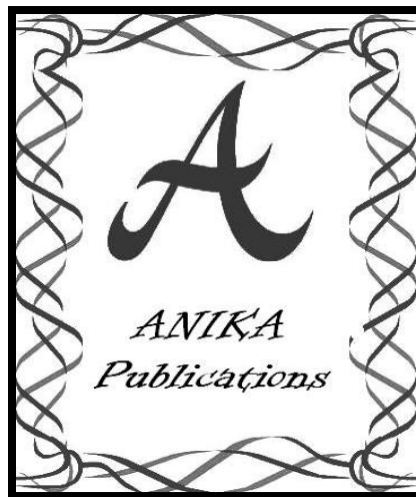
CONFUSABLES

[THIS BOOKLET IS AN EXCERPT FROM THE MAIN BOOK TITLED “WORD BANK”]

An excellent aid to learning and recalling elegant English words

By

Seshadri Reddy Harish Reddy



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Other books by the authors:

1) “BLAME IT ON ME”: A real life black comedy. Published by Frog Books, an imprint of Leadstart Publishing Pvt Ltd, Mumbai. (ISBN: 978-93-80154-21-3)

website: www.blameitonme.in

2)

“WORD BANK” : Memoria-Technika; Learn and recall abstruse English words. Published by Anika Publications, Hyderabad. (ISBN 978-93-5067-886-2)

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Preface

Every man's memory is his private literature.

Aldous Huxley

The aphorism in the title of this book - WORD BANK SERIES - is very apt as the English language is in the *business* of borrowing and lending *words* as do the commercial *banks* with money. English is the world's largest borrower of words from almost every other language on earth.

English has also influenced almost every other language on earth by lending words. English is all-pervasive and the main tool in knowledge management. Its influence in the world of computers needs no elaboration. In the internet era, English is the undisputed *lingua franca* - a language that is widely used as a means of communication among speakers of English and various other languages.

Most books titled 'Word Power' do not tell you how to recall those difficult and complex words in times of need. No matter what you learn, albeit in bits and pieces, many elegant words desert you - just when you need them most. Those elegant and complex words you have so painstakingly learnt have the uncanny ability to evaporate soon after you put the book back on the shelf.

One seemingly good way to learn the meanings of complex and exotic words is to peruse some usage-sentences containing the target words. Then you are more likely to comprehend the contextual meanings of the embedded complex words. However, while the depth of your understanding of difficult words improves, recall faculty continues to be elusive.

On the contrary, the recall feature of any story that you might have read even decades ago is truly remarkable. When you recall a story, you recall the embedded words too. You recall the story; the sentences and the embedded difficult words flash in your mind spontaneously.

Reading stories, narratives, anecdotes, news, and quotes containing elegant and complex words is the answer to your quest to master the art of learning and recalling abstruse and recondite words at will. This book attempts to provide such inputs. All you have to do is to dig deep and mine for the diamonds within.

You will certainly reap a rich harvest of useful, elegant and complex words as you turn the last leaf of this book.

Accuracy in choice of words is the key to effective communication.

The choice of right words depends on the spontaneity of your recall faculty.

Exercises are provided at the end of each chapter to help you recapitulate many of the abstruse and elegant words you will encounter. Please take the time to complete these exercises as this will further enhance your recall capacity.

Preface

This book titled “WORD BANK SERIES: Confusables” enumerates certain similar sounding words - with different meanings - that are likely to lead to malapropism; the misuse of a word through confusion with another word, especially when the effect is comical or ridiculous. This book also covers a few other aspects of English – such as “Homonyms”, “spelling of words”, “usage of articles (a, an, and the)” etc prone to confusion in their usage. The epilogue throws light on some common errors amounting to various degrees of abuse of the English language.

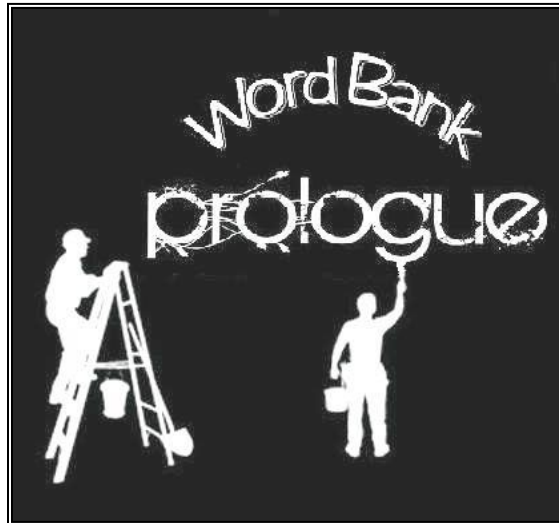
Prologue

Memory is the treasury and guardian of all things.

Marcus Tullius Cicero

Memory is the mother of all wisdom.

Aeschylus



It is the dream of every English-speaking person to master usage of elegant English words and develop an ability to recall these words effortlessly with a high degree of certainty as and when required.

If you have such a dream, this is the book for you: **“WORD BANK”**

Let this high-recall no longer remain a dream. 'High-Recall' of difficult and complex English words is the central idea of this unique book on developing skills in English language. In the seemingly endless quest of improving your English language skills, you may have come across a wide range of books with titles such as:

- *How to build a better vocabulary*
- *Improve your English*
- *Synonyms and Antonyms*
- *Proverbs*
- *Quotations*
- *Idioms and Phrases*

Prologue

- *Spelling power made easy*
- *Word power made easy*
- *Dictionary of Difficult Words*
- *Visual dictionary*
- *Improve your grammar*
- *Thesaurus*
- *English dictionary* (Humblest of all with no tall claims)

And the like...

This is an overwhelming array indeed!

The dictionaries, which many of us have on our bookshelves or desks, and which we occasionally consult, have one strange common feature: most of their contents are never referred to. They do contain words such as **apple, boat, cat, donkey, elephant, fox, goat, hat, ink, jug, kite, lion, moon, nest, owl, pen, queen, rat, sun, table, umbrella, van, wolf, x-ray, yellow, zebra**; all these words are listed in alphabetical order just for the effect. I have found no need to refer to any dictionary for these words after graduation from kindergarten at the tender age of five. However, many exotic words are omitted in many dictionaries. I am not undermining the position of these dictionaries in the literary world of English. They certainly serve some laudable purpose and have an important role to play. It may be of interest to note that even a "concise" Oxford English Dictionary with half-a million plus entries may not contain all the words. Even if it does, it is out of our reckoning in the context of our aim to sharpen our ability to recall the complex and exotic words. A dictionary is like an ocean: water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink; this said impertinently and irreverently in a lighter vein and not to be taken literally. Many dictionaries do not contain the less frequently used words, which may be the real and exotic gems. So the dictionary is definitely out of our reckoning in our quest for learning and recalling complex and exotic words.

Ironically enough, the BBC reports that a man spent a year poring over the Oxford English Dictionary (20 volumes, 21,730 pages and 59 million words). This caused him severe headaches, deteriorating eyesight and injuries to his back and neck. The end result? If you throw ten reasonably obscure words at him, he is able to correctly define around five of them. Needless to say, this mechanistic, soul-devouring technique is not for the faint-hearted, and it does not guarantee recall when you need it most; it's certainly not something I would ever recommend to someone with poor eyesight or a bad back. However, for the lesser mortals amongst us who are looking for a more sustainable technique, we have to find another way, but certainly not any modified beaten track. It has to be a truly revolutionary concept. Please read on and you will soon find an answer to this vexing problem on our hands. Or is it in our heads?

Some books claim to make the learning process easy. Take for instance, the book titled "WORD POWER MADE EASY" or "SPELLING POWER MADE EASY". Whoever came up with those titles must have been dreaming. Perhaps, they were simply being audacious or over-optimistic. Acquiring any type of power, word power included, had never been easy; nor will it ever be. The

Prologue

road to progress is steep, long, and arduous indeed. If you have ever tried to climb a tall mountain without gadgets and reached the peak, you would certainly appreciate this statement. If things seem to be going easy, you are going downhill all the way. I am sure that you do not wish to end up in such a situation, notwithstanding your secret yearning to make things easy. Whoever said that things are easy! Never ever! There is no easy path to progress, just as there is no such thing as a free lunch in this world. You have to work for it, and you have to work hard at that. So be prepared for the toil on your path of progress. No blood or tears need be shed! Just a hundred hours of your time will do. If you are toil-worn at the end, it is well worth it. It is better to be worn out than rust out.

I have seen a book titled “DICTIONARY OF DIFFICULT WORDS”. Yes, the title of the book is very appropriate. It is a dictionary of difficult words, indeed. But, to what avail is it? The book does not tell you how to recall those difficult and complex words in times of need. Those abstruse words you learn so laboriously vanish from your memory bank instantly. All you have is a heavy bookshelf and a lighter wallet. Of course, you would still continue to be an English speaking person sans those abstruse words in your memory bank, not to speak of quick recall of those enigmatic words so painstakingly learnt.

When attending high school, I used to learn by heart some Telugu poems contained in the epic Mahabharata without even understanding many difficult words therein. The school’s Telugu curriculum included a brilliant concept called “prathipadartham”: a repertoire of meanings of all the words contained in the poem. We were required to reproduce some Telugu poems and write “Prathipradartham” below the poems during examinations. Telugu poetry, especially the epic “Mahabharata”, is unsurpassable in its quality and content of complex words. The epic is narrated in the form of poetry and that makes it more interesting and truly recallable. Why am I talking of stories? Reading stories, narratives or anecdotes with difficult words is the answer to your quest to master the art of learning and recalling difficult words at will. If you are not comfortable with the term “difficult words”, then let’s call them “complex words” or “abstruse words”. In this book, we shall use the words 'difficult', 'complex', or 'abstruse' somewhat synonymously.

Here, I shall attempt to write some stories, narratives, anecdotes and the like with an abundance of complex words. Please make visual and vocal pictures of the complex words in your mind’s eye, as you read on. The target words are generally “italicized and contained within quotes”.

You will certainly be endowed with a quick recall faculty as you toil and make inroads up the hill, reading this book comprising a rich collection of complex words.

There is abundant evidence to prove that there is a strong correlation between one’s degree of excellence in vocabulary and his or her measure of success in social, economic, cultural, literary, professional, and intellectual spheres. What would you be when you are done with this book? It is your call! What is a small block of your time, compared to the fruits of your labour in absorbing the contents of this book? Your love of English and the ensuing labour in enhancing the language skills will certainly bear fruit.

Prologue

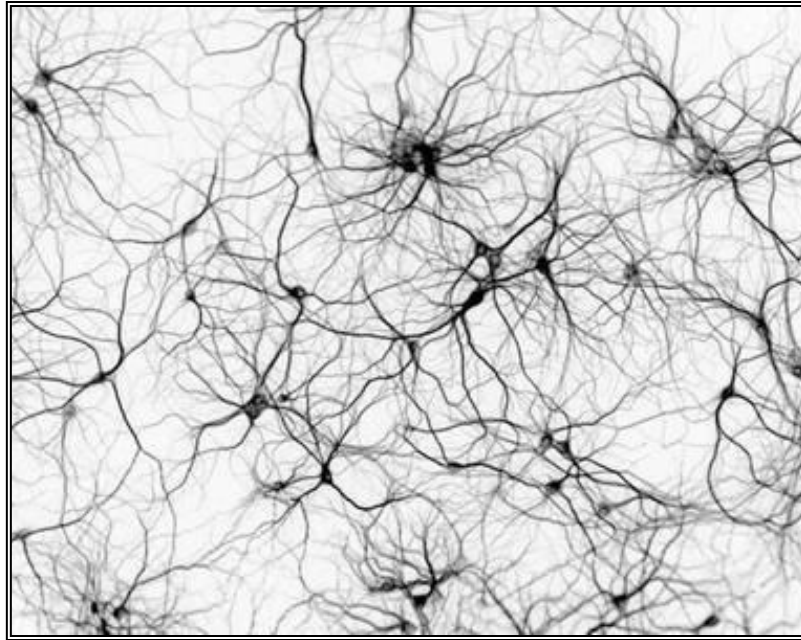
I shall try to ‘elucidate’ the meaning and full ‘import’ of any difficult word as and when it appears in the text of this book. This, I shall do as I am more than certain that you would have no ‘inclination’ to refer to any bulky dictionary to ‘decipher’ the meaning of any difficult words that you may encounter while reading this book. Moreover, you may not possess a ‘comprehensive’ dictionary in the first place, nor intend to acquire one. Even if you possess a ‘gargantuan’ dictionary, there is no assurance that the target word exists therein. If I do not explain any difficult or unusual word instantly on its appearance, you may conveniently skip over and the very purpose of reading this book will be lost; You may even be ‘dismayed’ and ‘overwhelmed’ by the ‘enormity’ of the subject, and even feel ‘trepidation’ and become ‘apprehensive’ about ‘pursuing’ the ‘arduous’ ‘mission’ of developing the ability to recall any difficult and complex word with considerable ease.

May I ‘exhort’ you to ‘endeavour’ in pursuit of excellence, ‘undaunted’! Sweet are the ‘exotic’ fruits of ‘diligent’ labour. To begin with, let us peruse the meanings of the ‘italicized’ words appearing in the above paragraph. These words are neither very difficult nor unusual. This is just a warm-up session to make you comfortable, for now. The ‘daunting’ part is yet to come.

The target words and their corresponding contextual meanings are stated in a tabular form to the extent possible in order to ‘quarantine’ them from the main text, for smooth reading. It provides you with the option to skip over if you are already familiar with those words.

Memory and Recall: The brain and neural networks:

This book attempts to provide input signals to the brain to enable a person recall any word learnt earlier and stored in memory, dormant or active. It is relevant here to learn how the brain functions. The system of brain function is simulated in complex business applications. Neural network technology is modelled after human brains, i.e. simulation of biological information processing via massive networks of processing elements called neurons. The neural networks are not digital or serial; they are analogue and parallel. They learn by examples and evolve; and not guided by programmed rules.



^ Brain: Neural Network ^

The human brain comprises about a billion neurons. Each neuron interacts directly with 1000-10,000 other neurons. A neuron fires or does not fire, depending on the strength of the input signals. Each neuron is viewed as a self-programming system that computes an output signal from an input signal. Each neuron has a transfer function that computes an output signal from an input signal(s). The neuron fires only when the combined strength of inputs is above a threshold level. The rate of firing determines the magnitude of information. The brain accepts the inputs that lead to a process of learning. The neurons are electronically interconnected to form a massive network. Neural networks are best applied in situations having a need for pattern recognition. Financial institutions, for example, are using neural networks to simulate cash management, asset management etc. In the capital investment arena, neural networks are used to simulate the reaction of investors to changes in organizational concerns such as capital structure, dividend policy, and reported earnings.

Word Bank: The Source

The main book titled “WORD BANK” comprises stories, anecdotes, news, narrations, quotes, pictures, etymology, tabulations etc. that will provide well-timed input signals to the brain in strength, surpassing the requisite threshold levels in order to trigger the memory recall mechanism.

THIS BOOKLET IS AN EXCERPT (CHAPTER 33) OF THE BOOK TITLED “WORD BANK”.

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Chapter 02: Homonyms can baffle you

Chapter 03: Kill, Kill

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Chapter 07: Greek and Latin

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Chapter 12: Uncommon ‘Common Endings’

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Chapter 24: Misspelt

Chapter 25: Long Words and Short Words

Chapter 26: Verbs - Pivotal Points

Chapter 33: Know thyself, friends, and foes

Epilogue: Usage and Abusage

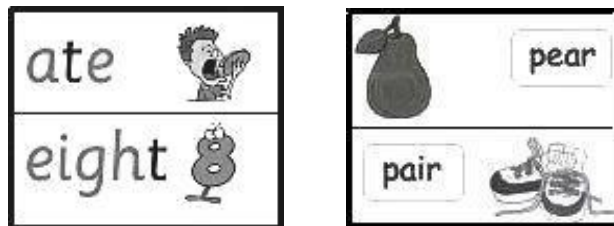
Appendix: Glossary of Abstruse Words

Homonyms can baffle you

Homonyms can baffle you

*"I'd be terrified to let the mayor testify. He's not a very articulate guy. When he answers questions, he answers in funny ways. He's Mayor **Malaprop** being asked questions by federal agents who want him to say something wrong so they can get an indictment."*

Patrick Cotter



Some words are pronounced similarly but are spelt differently and have diverse meanings. Such words are categorized as **Homonyms**. If you make an error in the usage of such words while speaking, it will probably go unnoticed unless it is totally out of context. However, if you make an error in writing, the slip will show and the result might be embarrassing or even disastrous at times.

*The use, through ignorance, of a word similar to but different in meaning from the one intended is called **malapropism**. If you say “mental facilities” instead of “mental faculties”, it is a **malapropism**.*

Etymology of malapropism:

MALAPROPISM

Meaning: *“the unintentional misuse of a word by confusion with one that sounds similar.”*

The word malapropism comes from the 1775 play **The Rivals**, by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and in particular from the character named Mrs. Malaprop who frequently misspoke to comic effect. This word is derived from the French phrase *mal à propos* (literally meaning "ill-suited").

Homonyms can baffle you

Mrs. Malaprop:

The following examples are from Sheridan's play.

- ☺ "...promise to forget this fellow - to *illiterate* him, I say, quite from your memory."
(i.e. *obliterate*; Act I Scene II Line 178)
- ☺ "...she might *reprehend* the true meaning of what she is saying." (i.e. *comprehend*; Act I Scene II Line 258)
- ☺ "...she's as headstrong as an *allegory* on the banks of Nile." (i.e. *alligator*; Act III Scene III Line 195)
- ☺ "Sure, if I *reprehend* any thing in this world it is the use of my *oracular* tongue, and a nice *derangement* of *epitaphs*!" (i.e. *apprehend*, *vernacular*, *arrangement*, *epithets*)

The alternative term to 'Malapropism' is 'Dogberryism'. This term comes from the Shakespearean play *Much Ado About Nothing*, in which the character Dogberry produces many *malapropisms* with comic effect.

There were plenty of malapropisms in existence before Mrs. Malaprop gave them an official designation. In fact, a highly motivated German scholar named Heinz Stallman went to the trouble of going through English plays up to 1800, looking for any malapropism he could find – he found nearly three hundred.

Here are a few ***homonyms*** that can baffle you.

➤ **discreet vs. discrete:**

Therefore, you must be ***discreet*** while using these ***discrete*** words.

<i>discreet</i>	careful, prudent
<i>discrete</i>	distinct, separate, unrelated

➤ **affect vs. effect:**

If you make such an error all too frequently, it will ***affect*** your literary standing and you will not be an ***effective*** communicator. It gets in the way of your literary pursuits.

<i>affect (verb)</i>	influence
<i>effect</i>	result of an action

Homonyms can baffle you

➤ **complement vs. compliment:**

Unless you **complement** your vocabulary with special training in usage of such words, you are unlikely to be **complimented** for your speech or write-up.

Here is a short story on **complement vs. compliment**.

An army general wanted to rationalize deployment of **staff** in canteen stores. He always carried a **staff** in his hand, as many officers do while on duty. He asked one of the girls, “What is the normal **complement** in these stores?”

The girl mistook the word **complement** for **compliment**.

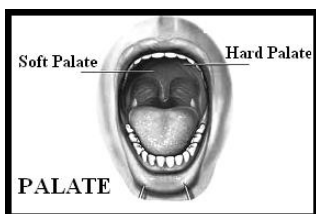
“Umm,” said the girl gingerly “Hi ya honey, you look gorgeous this morning!”

<i>complement</i>	that which completes or fills up
<i>compliment</i>	an expression of regard or praise, delicate flattery
<i>staff (1)</i>	a body of persons employed in an organization
<i>staff (2)</i>	a stick carried in hand, a stick or ensign of authority

➤ **palate, pallet and palette:**

A poor artist with a **cleft palate**, living in a garret used to sleep on a **pallet** and kept his colour **palette** by his side all the time.

<i>palate</i>	roof of mouth
<i>pallet</i>	a hard mattress of straw
<i>palette</i>	a little board on which a painter mixes his colours

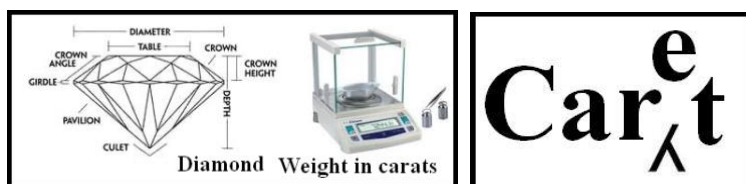
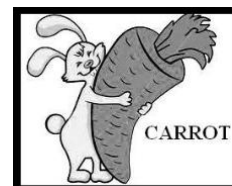


➤ **carrot, carat(karat) and caret:**

Homonyms can baffle you

When you write '**carrot**' instead of **carat** in error, while stating the weight of a diamond, please correct the error by cutting off the wrong word viz. **carrot** and insert the right word viz. **carat** with a **caret** (^) mark .

<i>carrot</i>	an edible sweet root, vegetable
<i>carat (karat)</i>	a unit of weight used for gems (metric carat = 200 mg)
<i>caret</i>	a mark (^) to show where to insert something omitted earlier



➤ **elicit vs. illicit:**

Always **elicit** a right word and avoid using an **illicit** word.

<i>elicit</i>	draw out, draw forth, evoke
<i>illicit</i>	forbidden, unlawful, improper

➤ **flair vs. flare:**

You may have **flair** for logical arguments, but do not argue to such an extent causing a **flare-up** of a dispute.

<i>flair</i>	a natural aptitude, knack
<i>flare</i>	to burn with glaring, flash, a blaze-up

➤ **principle vs. principal:**

Once a highly **principled** **principal** of a high school borrowed some money from a friend and he kept on paying interest every month. However, the **principal** could never return the **principal** amount to his friend.

<i>principle</i>	a rule of conduct, a fundamental truth on which others are founded, a settled rule of action
<i>principal (1)</i>	head of a school or college
<i>principal (2)</i>	original amount of loan, borrowed amount

Homonyms can baffle you

➤ **inter vs. intra:**

The national club selected the winners at **intra-state** athletic events for participation in **inter-state** sports competition at national level.

<i>intra</i>	within
<i>Inter</i>	among, between

➤ **colonel vs. kernel:**

The **colonel** ate a **kernel**, when he was hungry.

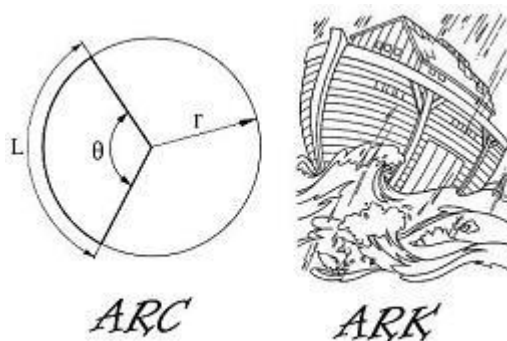
<i>colonel</i>	an army officer in command of a regiment
<i>kernel</i>	a seed within a hard shell, edible part of a nut (e.g. coconut)

➤ **arc vs. ark:**

The artist drew an **arc** on top of a painting.

God instructed Noah to build an **ark** and save life on earth from the Flood.

<i>arc</i>	a portion or segment of a circle
<i>ark</i>	a water-borne vessel



➤ **bloc vs. block:**

Two **blocs** of certain nations tried to **block** each other's progress, due to some unhealthy rivalry.

<i>bloc</i>	an alliance or group
<i>block</i>	an obstacle to progress, a large solid piece, a large building

➤ **bow vs. bough:**

Homonyms can baffle you

I was walking in a park and came across a tree with a large **bough** in the shape of a **bow** that was **bowing** towards the earth. I saw a signboard preset on the **bow** stating "Please **bow** before nature, stoop and proceed".

<i>bough</i>	a main branch of a tree
<i>bow (1)</i>	to bend the neck or the body in
<i>bow (2)</i>	an instrument to shoot an arrow



Bough



Bow (1)



Bow (2)

➤ **cannon vs. canon:**

Cannons were extensively used in warfare.

Exploitation of the weaker sections of a society by the authorities is against all **canons** of civilization.

<i>cannon</i>	A piece of artillery
<i>canon</i>	A general principle, rule or law.

➤ **complacent vs. complaisant:**

A **complacent** person may or may not be **complaisant**.

<i>complacent</i>	Self-satisfied usually without regard to problems
<i>complaisant</i>	desirous of pleasing others

➤ **moll, mall, and maul:**

A **moll** went to a **mall** where she was **mauled** by a rival gangster.

<i>moll</i>	a gangster's girlfriend, a prostitute
<i>maul</i>	to wound by scratching or tearing
<i>mall</i>	a large shopping area

Homonyms can baffle you

➤ **rain, reign and rein:**

A **reign** of terror was unleashed by the sinful, as the **reigning** monarch had no means of **reining** in the terrorists.

<i>rain</i>	condensed moisture of atmosphere falling on earth in droplets
<i>reign</i>	to rule as monarch, a period of someone being predominant
<i>rein</i>	a means of curbing or governing or controlling

➤ **vein, whine, wine and vine:**

My friend was **whining** that he never tasted a good **wine**. I took him to a **vineyard** and bought him a bottle of **wine**. The **wine** was thick and looked like blood oozing out of a ruptured **vein**.

<i>vine</i>	a climbing plant that produces grapes; a climbing or trailing stem or plant; vineyard: a plantation of vines
<i>wine</i>	an alcoholic drink made from fermented grape juice.
<i>whine</i>	to complain in an unmanly way, to utter a plaintive cry
<i>vein</i>	a vessel or tube that carries blood.

➤ **inequity vs. iniquity:**

The citizens are unhappy over the **inequity** of the prevailing justice system in the country. The judge was impeached for his many acts of **iniquity**.

<i>inequity</i>	lack of equity, lack of fairness or justice
<i>iniquity</i>	great injustice or extreme immorality, a grossly immoral act

However, **inequality** means: want of equality, difference, inadequacy, unevenness, or dissimilarity.

➤ **apposite vs. opposite:**

What I am saying is **apposite** and certainly not **opposite**.

<i>Apposite</i>	being of striking appropriateness and relevance; very applicable; apt.
<i>Opposite</i>	diametrically opposed; Facing on the other side; Placed, or being, face to face, or at two extremities of a line.

➤ **may be vs. maybe:**

Homonyms can baffle you

It **may be** necessary to have a second opinion regarding the ailment.

Maybe, the second opinion will be more accurate and helpful in treatment of the disease.

<i>may be</i>	may be is a verb phrase indicating a possibility
<i>Maybe</i>	maybe is an adverb meaning: perhaps

Exercise:

1. What is the difference between the words: '**inquiry**' and '**enquiry**'?
2. Does the word '**blond**' describe a female?
3. Is the usage '**can not**' appropriate? Or '**cannot**'?
4. Is the usage '**in fact**' appropriate? Or '**infact**'?
5. Is the usage '**in depth**' appropriate? Or '**indepth**'?
6. What is the difference between '**it's**' and '**it is**'?
7. Can we split the word '**its**' by an apostrophe as '**it's**'
8. What is the difference between 'inequity' and 'iniquity'?

Answers:

- 1) '**inquiry**' and '**enquiry**' mean the same and either is acceptable.



- 2) '**blond**' refers to a boy or man; but '**blonde**' refers to girl or woman.
- 3) '**cannot**' is always one word. (do not write as '**can not**')
- 4) '**in fact**' is always two words. (do not write as '**infact**')
- 5) '**in depth**' is always two words. (do not write as '**indepth**')
- 6) '**it's**' is the shortened form of '**it is**'. (e.g. **it's** definitely a better option)
- 7) '**its**' is a possessive pronoun that is never split by an apostrophe. (The old computer definitely served **its** purpose)
- 8) '**inequity**' = lack of equity, lack of fairness or justice ; '**iniquity**' = great injustice or extreme immorality, a grossly immoral act

Similar, but Different



Before we delve into this subject, it may be relevant to note the following definitions.

Homograph: word with same spelling as another - a word that is spelled in the same way as one or more other words but is different in meaning, e.g. the verb "project" and the noun "project."

Homonym: a word having the same sound and perhaps the same spelling as another, but with a different meaning and origin, e.g. 'plane' and 'plain.'

Some words are similar in spelling and pronunciation, but have very different meanings. Errors in usage of such words would not go unnoticed, especially in written English. It may even lead to *malapropism*; the misuse of a word through confusion with another word that sounds similar, especially when the effect is ridiculous.

Some such words are tabulated below.

➤ **Adapt vs. Adopt**

<i>adapt</i>	to adapt a thing is to change it for a particular purpose.
<i>adopt</i>	to adopt is to accept it unchanged and then use it. e.g. one adopts a child, a religion etc.

➤ **Adverse vs. Averse:**

<i>adverse</i>	contrary; opposed; unfavourable - n. adversary: opponent
<i>averse</i>	adj. disinclined; reluctant; feel dislike, hatred.

➤ **Aid vs. Aide:**

Similar, but different

<i>aid</i>	<i>Aid</i> refers to assistance. e.g. The minister needed no <i>aid</i> .
<i>aide</i>	<i>Aide</i> is a helper. The <i>aide</i> was helpful to the minister.

➤ **Amiable vs. Amicable:**

<i>amiable</i>	amiable, agreeable, or good-natured is applied to a persons and their disposition. e.g. His was a most amiable nature.
<i>amicable</i>	amicable, friendly, or pleasant refers to relationships, attitudes, settlements; e.g. Amiable people have generally amicable relationships..

➤ **Appraise vs. Apprise:**

<i>appraise</i>	to estimate the value of something.
<i>apprise</i>	to notify someone of something.

➤ **Ascent vs. Assent:**

<i>ascent</i>	going up - e.g. the ascent to the throne.
<i>assent</i>	agreement - e.g. The government gave assent to the request of the institution.

➤ **Bail vs. Bale:**

<i>bail</i>	n. one who procures the release of an accused person by becoming security for his appearing in court; cross pieces of a wicket - e.g. One bails out a prisoner; One bails out water from a boat.
<i>bale</i>	a bundle of hay, cotton, wood etc.

➤ **Bloc vs. Block:**

<i>bloc</i>	<i>Bloc</i> is a coalition of people, groups, or nations with a common motive or interest. e.g. European nations formed a <i>Bloc</i> to promote trade.
<i>block</i>	<i>Block</i> is a mass of wood or stone; a group of buildings forming a square shaped mass, bounded by intersecting streets. e.g. The museum is three <i>blocks</i> away from here.

➤ **Cession vs. Session:**

Similar, but different

<i>cession</i>	<i>Cession</i> refers to the act of ceding. e.g. The joint parliamentary committee ratified the <i>cession</i> agreement.
<i>session</i>	<i>Session</i> refers to meeting or term. e.g. Entire <i>session</i> of the parliament was wasted by false allegations by the opposition party.

➤ **Confidant vs. Confident:**

<i>confidant</i>	<i>Confidant</i> refers to a trustworthy friend.
<i>confident</i>	<i>Confident</i> refers to having full belief, being self-assured. e.g. I am <i>confident</i> of winning the election with the help of my <i>confidant</i> .

➤ **Co-respondent vs. Correspondent:**

<i>co-respondent</i>	<i>Co-respondent</i> is a man or woman charged with adultery.
<i>correspondent</i>	<i>Correspondent</i> is one who contributes letters, or is employed to send special reports.

➤ **Council vs. Counsel:**

<i>council</i>	an advisory or deliberative assembly or body of persons. e.g. The national productivity council is involved in matters of productivity in Industry.
<i>counsel</i>	advice or opinion given or offered. e.g. The students were counselled to prepare for the examination.

➤ **Devolve vs. Evolve:**

<i>devolve</i>	to roll down; to hand down; to deliver over, esp. powers to regional governments by central government.
<i>evolve</i>	to unroll; to disclose; to develop; to unravel.

➤ **die vs dye:**

<i>die</i>	stop living.
<i>dye</i>	colour something by soaking.

➤ **Disburse vs. Disperse:**

Similar, but different

<i>disburse</i>	to pay out - e.g. The budgeted amount for child welfare was disbursed by the government.
<i>disperse</i>	to scatter in all directions; to spread; to diffuse; e.g. The unruly mob was dispersed by the police by firing in the air.

➤ **Discreet vs. Discrete:**

<i>discreet</i>	Discreet refers to being careful about what a person does or says. e.g. The employee was discreet while asking for a promotion.
<i>discrete</i>	Discrete means, "separate or distinct." e.g. The process comprises several discrete steps.

➤ **Effusion vs. Diffusion:**

<i>effusion</i>	pouring or streaming out; emission; shedding (as of blood) - adj. effusive.
<i>diffusion</i>	a spreading or scattering; distribution; mixture through each other of gases or liquids in contact.

➤ **Envelop vs. Envelope:**

<i>envelop</i>	a verb meaning to surround.
<i>envelope</i>	a paper container for a letter.

➤ **Equable vs. Equitable:**

<i>equable</i>	moderate and steady; as in "an equable climate".
<i>equitable</i>	fair and just; as in "an equitable distribution of wealth".

➤ **Fictitious vs. Factitious:**

<i>fictitious</i>	not genuine; arbitrarily devised; not real; deceptively assumed; imaginary; unreal. - as in "fictional literature".
<i>factitious</i>	artificial; not natural; made up for a particular occasion; not spontaneous.

➤ **Hangar vs. Hanger:**

Similar, but different

<i>hangar</i>	a building that generally houses airplanes. e.g. The Air Marshall sent the plane to the <i>hangar</i> at the air force base for servicing.
<i>hanger</i>	a device used for hanging clothes. e.g. I have several <i>hangers</i> in my wardrobe.

➤ **Illusive vs. Elusive:**

<i>illusive</i>	adj. a false conception; a deceptive belief, statement or appearance - n. illusion
<i>elusive</i>	v. elude: escape by stratagem; to fail to be discovered - adj. elusive: practicing elusion - adj. elusory: tending to elude - n. elusiveness.

➤ **Illusion vs. Allusion:**

<i>illusion</i>	a false conception; a deceptive belief, statement or appearance.
<i>allusion</i>	indirect reference; to make a reference to something is to name it; one makes an allusion to something not actually named.

➤ **Impassible vs. Impossible:**

<i>impassible</i>	unfeeling; incapable of being hurt; impassive.
<i>impossible</i>	not possible.

➤ **Immunity vs. Impunity:**

<i>immunity</i>	exemption from a liability; freedom from anything evil or harmful. e.g. immunity from pain or disease.
<i>impunity</i>	impunity is less extensive in its meaning: exemption from a penalty or punishment; exemption from loss or injury. e.g., one cannot commit a murder with impunity.

➤ **Insidious vs. Invidious:**

<i>insidious</i>	adj. watching an opportunity to ensnare; intended to entrap; deceptive. - n. insidiousness. - adv. insidiously.
<i>invidious</i>	adj. likely to incur or provoke ill-will; likely to excite envy; offensively discriminating. - n. invidiousness - adv. invidiously.

➤ **Insure vs. Ensure:**

Similar, but different

<i>insure</i>	insure is a usual word in the field of life-insurance, health insurance contracts etc.
<i>ensure</i>	to make sure of something as in “to ensure safety of the workers...”

➤ **Inter vs. Intra:**

<i>inter</i>	between or among. as in “Interstate sports competition”
<i>intra</i>	within. - as in “intravenous injection”, “Intrastate sports competition” etc.

➤ **Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic:**

<i>intrinsic</i>	inherent; genuine; essential - n. intrinsicality - adv. intrinsically. - as in “intrinsic nature of humans”
<i>Extrinsic</i>	ad. external; not contained in or belonging to a body; foreign. - n. extrinsicality - adj. extrinsic.

➤ **Ordinance vs. Ordnance:**

<i>Ordinance</i>	a regulation, by-law, rule that is less permanent and less constitutional, less general than a law or statute.
<i>Ordnance</i>	the public establishment concerned with military stores and materials; the management of artillery.

➤ **Personal vs. Personnel:**

<i>Personal</i>	of the nature of a person; of or relating to a person; relating to private concerns. - as in “May ask you a personal question?”
<i>Personnel</i>	the persons employed in any service; people in general.

➤ **Plain vs. Plane:**

<i>Plain</i>	a plain is a stretch of a flat country. - as in “It rains in Spain mainly in the plains”..
<i>Plane</i>	plane is either a level surface in mathematics or a level in the abstract. - as in “on an intellectual plane”; also short for aeroplane.

➤ **Potable vs. Portable:**

Similar, but different

<i>Potable</i>	adj. fit to drink. - as in “potable water”
<i>Portable</i>	easily or conveniently carried or moved about. - as in “portable equipment”.

➤ **Prescribe vs. Proscribe:**

<i>Prescribe</i>	to recommend; advise; order.
<i>Proscribe</i>	proscribe has an opposed meaning: to prohibit; to condemn.

➤ **Yoke vs. Yolk:**

<i>yoke</i>	a cross piece holding two things together. - as in “The Oxen were yoked.”
<i>Yolk</i>	yellow portion of an egg.

Exercise:

1. What is a homograph?
2. What is a homonym?

If you are not sure of the answers to these questions, at least remember that all these words come under one cluster: “Words that are similar, identical, or near identical in spelling, and/or pronunciation; but have different meanings.”

If you are keen to learn the exact definitions, go back to beginning of this chapter.

Confusables



Choice of a wrong word can be disastrous.

A language is not like science or mathematics and has very few absolutes. We have choices in choosing words from among many alternatives. Choosing the right word requires practice and effort. The most common mistakes are spelling wrongly or pronouncing wrongly. Sometimes wrong words convey exactly the opposite meaning of the intended communication. Homonyms can really baffle you. There is a separate chapter on homonyms in this book. It would also be a good practice to look at synonyms to choose the right word in a particular context.

Choosing the right word is a key success factor in communication. Some words convey exactly the opposite meaning of the intended communication, the results of which need no elaboration.

Sometimes, a whole story could be encapsulated in a single word or a phrase.

You could be spared the trouble of writing or narrating a long-winded account of an issue, by using such words or phrases that say it all. Moreover, by doing so you are also dwelling into the past and making subtle comparisons that display some conviction, logic and valid precedence. An earlier chapter titled *“History Capsules”* deals with this subject.

Brevity is the soul of wit. Origin: From Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, 1602:

Polonius:

My liege, and madam, to expostulate
What majesty should be, what duty is,
What day is day, night night, and time is time,
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time;
Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit,

Confusables

And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,
I will be brief. Your noble son is mad. . . .

Hamlet Act 2, scene 2, 86-92 :

Polonius, right-hand man of Hamlet's stepfather, King Claudius, has been employed to spy on the prince and report on his very odd behaviour. As Polonius begins to deliver to the king and queen the results of his investigation, he embarks on this windy preface. Besides being nonsensical, his speech is self-contradictory: he wastes plenty of time denouncing the time wasted by rhetorical speechifying.

"*Brevity is the soul of wit*" has become a standard English proverb; in the process, its context has been somewhat neglected. Polonius, though he has high opinions indeed of his "wit" (that is, acumen), is the least brief and one of the least "witty" characters in the play. Freud aptly referred to Polonius as "the old chatterbox" in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*.

There is no better way to demonstrate the choice of right words than stating some examples. Imagine the consequences of using a wrong word, from among the following.

➤ ***Abdicate vs. Abrogate:***

Abdicate means, "to formally renounce or give up."

Abrogate means, "to annul."

The King ***abdicated*** the throne.

The King ***abrogated*** the agreement.

➤ ***Abuse vs. misuse:***

Abuse means, "using something wrongly."

He ***abused*** the new car.

Misuse means "use of something for which it is not designed."

He ***misused*** the stationery at the office.

➤ ***Abundant vs. Redundant:***

Abundant means, "plenty."

Redundant means, "Superfluous or over-copious."

He took an ***abundant*** precaution.

It is ***redundant*** to keep excessive number of spare parts..

➤ ***Accede vs. Concede:***

To ***accede*** means "taking a position of authority or to yield."

Government ***acceded*** to the genuine demands of the farmers.

To ***concede*** means, "to accept reluctantly."

Government ***conceded*** to the unreasonable demands of the opposition.

➤ ***Accuse vs. allege:***

To ***accuse*** means, "to charge someone of a wrongdoing."

To ***allege*** means, "to claim something not yet proven."

Confusables

The citizens **accused** the police of complicity in the crime.
The police **alleged** that the people were to blame.

➤ **Acute vs. Chronic:**

Acute means, “severe condition.”

Chronic means, “a prolonged condition.”

He is suffering from an **acute** disease.

He is suffering from a **chronic** disease.

➤ **Affect vs. effect:**

Affect means, “to influence or change.”

Effect (noun) means “result.”

The moon **affects** the ocean tides.

There was no **effect** of the tidal waves in the coastal towns.

➤ **Alter vs. Altar:**

Alter means, “to change.”

Altar is the platform at front of a temple.

The animal was sacrificed at the **altar**.

The design of the temple was **altered**.

➤ **Assume vs. Presume:**

Assume means, “to assume is to take unto oneself; to undertake an office or duty. assumption is an act of assuming.

Presume is to take for granted - e.g. I presume that you would agree to this proposal.

➤ **Collision vs. Collusion:**

Collision refers to crash.

Collusion is a secret between parties.

The **collision** between the buses resulted in death of many passengers.

The **collusion** among the unscrupulous businesspersons resulted in high prices.

➤ **Illusion vs. Delusion:**

Illusion means, “a false conception; a deceptive belief, statement or appearance.” e.g. magicians can create an illusion.

Delusion means, “believing that the false is true.” e.g. The impression that the sun goes around the earth was formerly a delusion, but is now an illusion.

➤ **Complement vs. Compliment:**

Here is a short story on “**complement**” vs. “**compliment**”.

Confusables

An army general wanted to rationalize deployment of staff in canteen stores. He always carried a staff in his hand, as many officers do while on duty. He asked one of the girls, “What is the normal “**complement**” in these stores?”

The girl mistook the word “**complement**” for “**compliment**”.

“Umm,” said the girl gingerly “Hi ya honey, you look gorgeous this morning!”

➤ **Contentious vs. Controversial:**

Contentious refers to quarrelsome, or given to dispute.

Controversial refers to an issue that is debatable, or arguable.

➤ **Continuous vs. Contiguous:**

Continuous means, “unbroken; uninterrupted in time or sequence.” e.g. The Engine was running **continuously**.

Contiguous means, “without a gap, touching” e.g. “touching”, as in ‘France and Spain are **contiguous**”.

➤ **Covert vs. Overt:**

Covert means, “concealed or hidden.”

Overt means, “open to view, apparent, or public.”

The spy network is conducting some **covert** operations.

Politicians give **overt** support to criminals

➤ **Depraved vs. Deprived:**

Depraved means, “morally corrupt.”

Deprived means, “lacking economically.”

The **deprived** masses revolted against their **depraved** King.

➤ **Digress vs. Regress:**

Digress means “to stray from the main theme of a discourse” - as in “to digress for a moment”.

Regress means “to go back” or “to move backward” or “to degenerate” - as in “some communities have a tendency to regress.”

➤ **Discovery vs. Invention:**

Discovery means, “finding an unknown but existing thing.”

Invention means, “to create a new thing.”

Columbus **discovered** America. James Watt **invented** steam engine.

➤ **Disinformation vs. Misinformation:**

Disinformation refers to conveying misleading information deliberately.

Misinformation refers to conveying wrong information.

➤ **Dispose vs. depose:**

Confusables

Dispose means, “to distribute; to apply for a particular purpose; to settle things - n. disposal.” e.g. The obsolete material was disposed of by the store manager; Disposal of pending litigations in courts is a long drawn process.

Depose means, “to remove from a high position; to degrade; to attest; to examine or put on oath; to bear witness; to swear.”

➤ **Dogmatic vs. Pragmatic:**

Dogmatic means, “authoritative, assertive or overbearing.”

Pragmatic means, “being practical.”

A **stigma** is better than a **dogma**.

A **dogmatic** person may not succeed in politics.

The finance minister prepared a **pragmatic** budget.

➤ **Dual vs. Duel:**

Dual refers to represent two things.

The hydro-electrical project serves a **dual** purpose viz. agriculture and power generation.

Duel refers to a formal fight between two persons to settle a dispute.

The prince was injured in the **duel** with his enemy.

➤ **Emigrant vs. Immigrant:**

Emigrant is one who leaves his country to settle in another.

Immigrant is one who enters another country to settle down.

➤ **Empathy vs. Sympathy:**

Empathy is one's ability to relate to others.

Sympathy refers to feeling sorry for someone in trouble.

The psychologist **empathized** with his patients.

The government was **sympathetic** towards farmers.

➤ **Endemic vs. Epidemic:**

An **endemic** disease is habitually prevalent in a particular area.

An **epidemic** spreads rapidly in a community at a given time and then dies out.

➤ **Especially vs. Specially:**

Especially means, “standing distinctively.”

Specially means, “for a specific reason or purpose”.

➤ **Euphony vs. Cacophony:**

Euphony means “pleasing and harmonious sounds”.

Cacophony means “harsh or discordant sounds”.

➤ **Exalt vs. Exult:**

Exalt means, “to set aloft or to elevate.”

Exult means, “to rejoice immensely.”

He reached an **exalted** position because of his great abilities.

Confusables

The Author **exulted** at being declared the winner of the literary award.

➤ **Explicit vs. Implicit:**

Explicit means, “clearly defined.”

Implicit means, “implied but not stated.”

The contractual obligations are **implicit**.

He made an **explicit** policy statement.

➤ **Facilitate vs. Felicitate:**

Facilitate means, “to make easier.”

Felicitate means, “to congratulate or to express joy.”

The infrastructure greatly **facilitated** the performance of the engineers.

The Author was **felicitated** on winning the literary award.

➤ **Fortuitous vs. Fortunate:**

Fortuitous means, “happening by chance.”

Fortunate means, “being lucky.”

But for **fortuitous** circumstances, he would not have come out alive.

He was **fortunate** to come out alive.

➤ **Gilt vs. Guilt:**

Gilt refers to gold covering; The document was **gilt**-edged.

Guilt is a state of a wrongdoing.

The **guilt** was firmly established by due legal process.

➤ **Hard vs. Hardly:**

He worked very **hard** at the office.

There was **hardly** any work to do at the office.

➤ **Hoard vs. Horde:**

Hoard refers to store in excess.

Horde refers to a crowd.

The unscrupulous businessperson **hoarded** the food grains during a period of shortages.

The bandits came in **hordes**.

➤ **Hypercritical vs. Hypocritical:**

Hypercritical means, “being excessively critical.”

Hypocritical means, “practicing hypocrisy.”

The opposition party is **hypercritical** of the actions of the government.

Politicians are **hypocritical** in matters of public interest.

➤ **Instinct vs. Intuition:**

Instinct is a natural inborn tendency in a living being.

Intuition is a kind of knowledge, which is not based on reasoning.

I ran away from the fire **instinctively**.

Confusables

I had the *intuition* that the prices may go down.

➤ **Introspection vs. Retrospection:**

Introspection is self-examination and an act of looking into oneself - as in “to be given to introspection”.

Retrospection is a survey of past events or looking back on old ways - as in “to indulge in retrospection”.

➤ **Invest vs. Divest:**

Invest means, “to lay out for profit, as by buying property, shares etc.”

Divest means, “to strip or deprive of anything.”

➤ **Kin vs. Kith:**

Kin refers to family members or relatives.

Kith refers to friends and acquaintances.

The dictator distributed the ill-gotten wealth among his *kith and kin*.

➤ **Lawful vs. Legal:**

Lawful means, “within the framework of the law.”

Legal means, “relating to law.”

➤ **Lightening vs. Lightning vs. lighting:**

Lightening means, “making lighter.”

My boss **lightened** my workload.

Lightning refers to “electrical discharge in a cloudy atmosphere.”

The building has **lightning** arresters on the roof as a measure of protection from **lightning**.

Lighting refers to providing illumination by using some device such as a lamp or electric bulb.

➤ **Linage vs. Lineage:**

Linage refers to the number of lines printed on a paper.

Lineage refers to ancestry or line of descent.

Newspapers charge the advertisers based on **linage**.

The family’s **lineage** was traced to 15th Century aristocracy.

➤ **Loose vs. Lose:**

Loose refers to slackness - not tight.

Lose refers to missing out on something.

➤ **Magnate vs. Magnet:**

Magnate refers to a powerful businessperson.

Magnet is anything or anyone that can attract.

➤ **Meandering vs. Philandering:**

Meander means ‘wind about.’ - as in “meandering river.”

Confusables

Philander means “to have casual affairs with many women’ - n. **philanderer**: a male flirt. - as in “Casanova was a **philanderer**.”

➤ **Oblivious vs. Obvious:**

Oblivious refers to being unaware or unmindful of something.

Obvious means, “easily perceived or understood.”

The prime minister appears to be **oblivious** of the corrupt practices of the cabinet ministers.

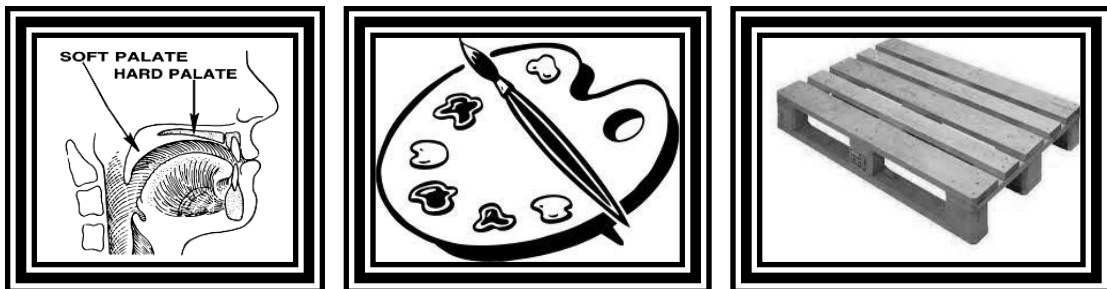
Obviously, he is feigning ignorance.

➤ **Palate vs Palette vs pallet:**

Palate is the roof of the mouth.

Palette is a hand held tray used by artists to mix colours.

Pallet is a cage or a platform used for loading and transporting material.



➤ **Peak vs. Peek:**

n. **Peak** means “a summit.”

v. **Peek** means “peep or snoop.”

➤ **Persecute vs. Prosecute:**

Persecute means, “to harass or treat unfairly.”

Prosecute means, “to pursue by law; to bring before court.”

Political dissent may result in **persecution** of the opponents by the ruling elite..

He was **prosecuted** for the crimes committed by him.

➤ **Pseudo vs. Quasi:**

Pseudo is a prefix to denote false or deceptive. - as in “Pseudo socialist.”

Quasi is a prefix to meaning resembling. - as in “Quasi-government organization.”

➤ **Refrain vs. Restrain:**

Refrain means, “to choose not to do something.”

Restrain means, “to forbid certain action by force.”

The doctor **refrained** from stating the prognosis of the disease.

The patient was **restrained** from going out.

Confusables

➤ *Statue vs. Statute:*

Statue is a sculpture of a person or an animal.

Statute is an established law.

The **statute** says, “it is illegal to install **statues** in the city’s public places without formal permission from the government.”

➤ *Troop vs. troupe:*

Troop is group of people.

Troupe is a company of actors and performers.

➤ *Veracious vs. Voracious:*

Veracious means, “truthful or accurate.”

Voracious means, “having an insatiable appetite.”

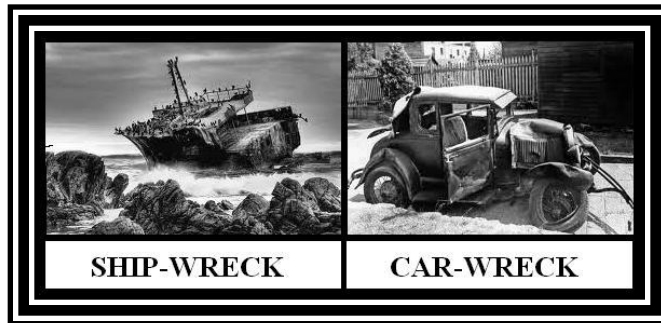
The **veracity** of the news is in question.

He is a **voracious** reader.

➤ *Wreak vs. Wreck:*

Wreak means, “to cause trouble.” - as in “depressed economy **wreaked** havoc on the housing industry.”

Wreck means, “to destroy something.” - as in “ship **wreck**...”



Exercise:

1. Differentiate between *kith* and *kin*.
2. Do you work *hard* or *hardly*? Do you know ‘*little*’ or ‘*a little*’ ?
3. Are you *prosecuted* or *persecuted* when you commit a crime?
4. Distinguish between *lightening*, *lightning*, and *lighting*.

Misspelt

Misspelt

*“A man occupied with public or other important business cannot, and need not, attend to **spelling**.”*

Napoleon Bonaparte

*“Sometimes you can't look up the correct **spelling** of a word in the dictionary because you don't know how to spell it.”*

Anonymous



Difficulties with words are not limited to meaning. Spelling too can cause problems, as can pronunciation, grammar etc. Sometimes, misspelling can lead to a hilarious, embarrassing, or disastrous situation.

‘misspell’ is one of the most *‘misspelt’* word in English language.

A compendium of some of the most commonly misspelt words in English language:

- # *abhorrent*
- # *accommodate*
- # *acquaintance*
- # *acquiesce*
- # *acquire*
- # *address*
- # *advisable*
- # *aficionado*
- # *all right*
- # *believe*
- # *bureaucracy*

Misspelt

- # *calendar*
- # *committee*
- # *diarrhoea*
- # *dismissal*
- # *eczema*
- # *fulfil*
- # *harass*
- # *hygiene*
- # *indigenous*
- # *jewellery*
- # *liaise*
- # *liqueur*
- # *maintenance*
- # *manoeuvre*
- # *millennium*
- # *minuscule*
- # *misspell*
- # *necessary*
- # *omitted*
- # *parallel*
- # *penicillin*
- # *perennial*
- # *personnel*
- # *pharaoh*
- # *Portuguese*
- # *privilege*
- # *receipt*
- # *recommend*
- # *referred*
- # *rhythm*
- # *seize*
- # *subtract*
- # *supersede*
- # *transferred*
- # *truly*
- # *weird*
- # *withhold*

Misspelt

Exercise: Correct the spelling errors in the following words.

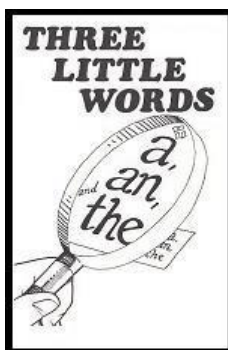
1. *accomodation*
2. *aquire*
3. *buraucracy*,
4. *calender*
5. *fulfill*
6. *reciept*,
7. *maintainance*
8. *pencilin*
9. *millenium*
10. *subtract*
11. *truely*
12. *wiered*.

Answers:

1. *accommodation* 2. *acquire* 3. *bureaucracy* 4. *calendar* 5. *fulfil* 6. *receipt* 7. *maintenance*
8. *penicillin* 9. *millennium* 10. *subtract* 11. *truly* 12. *weird*

English Articles: a, an, the

In English language, nouns are preceded by an article that specifies the definiteness or indefiniteness of the noun. The definite article is ***the*** in all cases, while indefiniteness is expressed with ***a*** or ***an*** for singular nouns.



a, an, the: English articles:

You have been taught at school about usage of English articles, as stated in the following scheme.

English Articles			
		singular	Plural/non-count
Indefinite	Before vowel sound	an	(None)
	Before consonant sound	a	
Definite		the	

❖ **Indefinite article:**

Please compare the standard usage of the indefinite article (***a***, ***an***) with the following examples.

- He learned ***a lesson or two***: This form [***a*** + ***noun*** + ***or two***] conveys the meaning as “many lessons”.
- He drank ***a litre or so*** of water: This form [***a*** + ***noun*** + ***or so***] conveys the meaning as “approximately one litre”.

[Please note that these two forms viz. [***a*** + ***noun*** + ***or two***] and [***a*** + ***noun*** + ***or so***] cannot be used synonymously.]

- I have visited the museum many ***a*** times.
- Father has gone ***a***-hunting.

English Articles: a, an, the

‘A’ and ‘an’ can also represent the number one. *An* is now used before words starting with a vowel sound, regardless of whether the word begins with a vowel letter.

Examples: **a** sanitary sewer overflow; **an** SSO (Sanitary Sewer Overflow); **an** hour; **a** ewe; **a** one-armed bandit; **an** heir; **a** unicorn (unicorn begins with ‘**yu**’, a consonant sound).

❖ **Definite article:**

The definite article in English is **the** denoting person(s) or thing(s) already mentioned, under discussion, implied, or familiar.

The article “**the**” is used with singular only and uncountable nouns when both the speaker and hearer would know the thing or idea already.

The article **the** is often used as the very first part of a **noun phrase** in English [*e.g. The* talkative man in the centre of the room.] In grammar, a **noun phrase** (abbreviated **NP**) is a phrase whose head is a noun or a pronoun [e.g. talkative woman], optionally accompanied by a modifier set [e.g. “in the center of the room”].

However, in English **the** definite article is omitted before familiar but intangible concepts such as “*happiness*”: “*Happiness is contagious*” is correct, whereas “*The happiness is contagious* is” not unless a very specific example of happiness is referred to.

Please compare the standard usage of the definite article (**the**) with the following examples.

- “**The** said apartment is leased to- “**The** then prime minister stated that

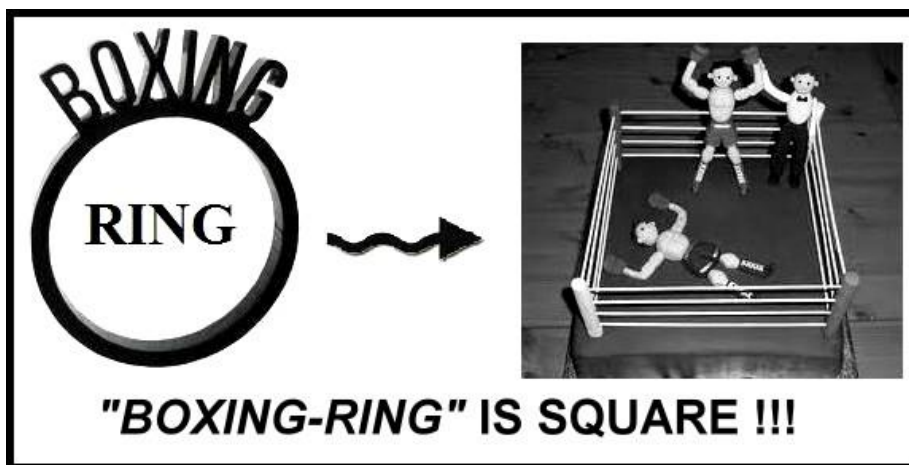
Exercise:

Think it over! Which of the following is an appropriate title for this book?

- Dictionary of difficult words
- **A** dictionary of difficult words
- **The** dictionary of difficult words

Funny Aspects of English

"English is a funny language. A fat chance and a slim chance are the same thing!"
Jack Herbert



I guess you are overwhelmed by all the complex words enumerated so far.
Let us take a small diversion and discuss the funny side of English.

English is the most widely spoken language in the history of the world. Half the books in the world are in English. It has the largest vocabulary. English dominates the computer world. Still some people, especially the French call it Esperanto of the proletariat.

What is the *“logic”* behind this huge popularity of English language? Is it because this language is *“illogical”*? Please pause and ponder after reading this chapter.

Oxymorons:



Funny Aspects of English

Let us begin with some illogical figures of speech and the possibilities of an **oxymoron**. An *oxymoron* is a figure of speech in which two contradictory terms appear together for emphasis, for example, "**deafening silence**" or "**thunderous silence**".

Etymology: From Greek: neuter of oxymoros (sharp dull), from oxys (sharp) + moros (dull). The word **moron** comes from the same root.

Examples:

- e-books
- numb sensation
- once again
- climb down
- dry lake
- fuzzy logic
- stand down
- crash landing
- park drive
- pretty ugly
- half naked
- half-truth
- open secret
- found missing
- tight slacks
- only choice
- exact estimate
- small crowd
- acting naturally

Oxymoron is also known as antiszygy.

Funny plurals:

- We start with a **box** and the plural is **boxes**, but the plural of **ox** should be **oxen**, not "**oxes**".
- You may find a lone **mouse** or a nestful of **mice**, but the plural of **house** is **houses**, not "**hice**".
- The plural of **man** is always **men**. How is it that the plural of **pan** is not "**pen**"?
- Plural of **foot** is **feet**. Would a pair of boots be called "**beet**"?
- If one is a **tooth** and a whole set are **teeth**, why should not the plural of **booth** be called "**beeth**"?
- We speak of a **brother** and of **brethren**; though we say **Mother**, we never say "**Methren**".

Funny Aspects of English

Anomalies and misnomers:

- *Boxing rings* are square. Then why are they called rings?
- We do shipping by truck but send cargo by ship. We do not do trucking by ship!
- We have noses that run and feet that smell!
- How can a *slim chance* and a *fat chance* be the same?
- A *wise man* and a *wise guy* are opposites!
- *Flammable* and *inflammable* are same!
- *Dry cleaning* uses fluid called naphtha!
- *Lead - pencils* use graphite and not lead!
- The *Peanut* is a legume, [i.e. fruit/vegetable] not a nut!
- There is no egg in eggplant!
- Quick sand works slowly!
- Guinea Pig is neither from Guinea nor is it a pig!
- When the *stars are out*, they are visible. But when the lights are out, they are invisible!
- To *overlook* something and to *oversee* something are very different!
- You *fill out* a form by filling it in!
- In what other language do people drive on the *parkway* and park on the *driveway*?
- How can the weather be *hot as hell* one day and *cold as hell* the next?
- Why is it that *night falls* but never breaks and *day breaks* but never falls?
- *Funny bone* is not a bone!
- *Lawsuit* is not a suit worn by lawyers or judges, but a case before court.
- “*Arabic numerals*” were not invented by Arabs, but by Indians.

The English language defies all logic! Shouldn't we call it creativity?

Tautology:

The repetition of an idea in different words is called tautology. If you say “*at 5 p.m. in the evening*”, it would be tautology, as the addition of the word *evening* is superfluous. Some tautologies are so well entrenched in practice and it is virtually impossible to drive them out. e.g. *Silly Fool, Old Crone, Young Lad, Null and Void, Lift Up, Join Together* etc. Some commonly and erroneously used tautologies are listed here:

- advance warning
- new addition

Funny Aspects of English

- a relic of the past
- an audible click
- actual fact
- repeated again
- usual habits
- future prospects
- free gift

Tautonyms:

A word or name made up of two identical parts or repeated-words is called a *tautonym*.



English language several *tautonyms* such as:

- tom-tom
- mama
- bye- bye
- papa
- pooh- pooh
- cha-cha-cha
- baa-baa
- blah -blah

When identical words are repeated, it is called a “first-order reproduction”.

A tautonym like dilly-dally or hocus-pocus, having dissimilar but similar sounding words, is called a “second-order reproduction”.

Letter words:

Funny Aspects of English

X-ray, the most familiar word is a letter word and needs no further explanation.



Some letter words are:

- A-bomb
- D-day
- H-bomb
- I-beam
- T-shirt
- U-turn
- U-bend
- V-day
- X-chromosome
- Y-chromosome

V-Day also has variations such as V-E Day (Victory in Europe Day) and V-J Day (Victory over Japan Day). Should we call them multi-letter words?

If the Second World War had a less desirable outcome, V-E Day might have meant something else (Victory over England Day). We might even have had V-F Day (Victory for Fascism Day or Victory for Fuehrer Day).

Same spelling and different meanings:

Sometimes, the spelling of a word is the same but with different meaning. It can get really confusing. Here is a collection of such words, termed *homographs* :

arrest (1): to stop; to check or hinder - as in “to arrest progress”.

arrest (2): to seize on and fix; as in “to arrest the attention of the audience”.

assume (1): to take for granted; to suppose - as in “to assume the truth of the statement”.

assume (2): to adopt; to take on or up - as in “to assume a haughty mien”.

Funny Aspects of English

assurance (1): boldness; confidence - as in “to have complete assurance”

assurance (2): guarantee; pledge - as in “to receive an assurance of support”.

compromise (1): to adjust or make a settlement by consensus - as in “to compromise a dispute”.

compromise (2): to expose to suspicion or disrepute - as in “to compromise a prospective witness”.

concur (1): to agree - as in “all the judges concur in the opinion”.

concur (2): to coincide; to get together - as in “international rules do not always concur”.

contend (1): to assert or maintain; to argue - as in “to contend that one’s opponent is wrong”.

contend (2): to compete; to vie – as in “to contend for a prize”.

dispense (1): to deal out in portions; to distribute - as in “to dispense rations”.

dispense (2): to forego; to give up or relinquish - as in “to dispense with a summer holiday”.

expedition (1): journey for a specific purpose - as in “an expedition of discovery to the Arctic”.

expedition (2): speed; dispatch - as in “the work progresses with expedition” or “the work progresses expeditiously”.

maintain (1): to keep in condition; to take care of - as in “to maintain one’s reputation” or “to maintain the machinery”.

maintain (2): to affirm; to assert - as in “to maintain that the plan won’t work”.

prone (1): inclined; disposed - as in “prone to criticism”.

prone (2): prostrate; flat, esp. face downward - as in “to lie prone on the floor”.

regard (1): to look at; to watch - as in “to regard the speaker closely”.

regard (2): to heed; to show respect for - as in “to regard one’s wishes”.

resolve (1): to make clear; to explain - as in “to resolve all doubts”.

resolve (2): to determine; to decide - as in “to resolve to act”.

Funny Aspects of English

retainer (1): fee paid to secure a prior claim to professional services, as of a lawyer - as in “the lawyer demanded a retainer fee”.

retainer (2): one who is attached to and serves a person of household - as in “a family retainer”.

sheer (1) : steep; perpendicular - as in “sheer cliff”.

sheer (2): downright; utter; unmitigated - as in “sheer nonsense”.

submit (1): to yield or defer to authority - as in “to submit to security regulations”.

submit (2): to offer or present as one’s opinion - as in “to submit that the charge is not proven”.

reflect (1): to ponder; to think carefully - as in “to reflect on the speaker’s words”.

reflect(2): to bring or cast discredit on - as in “to reflect on a person’s reputation”.

Punctuation marks:

Punctuation marks play a very important role in the clarity of English language.

Compare “*Let us eat, Mom*” and “*Let us eat Mom*”. The absence of comma makes you a cannibal, as in the case of the latter.

Comma is an elusive villain among punctuation marks. Misuse of a comma could be a matter of life or death! Compare “Hang him, not let him free” and “Hang him not, let him free”. What a difference it makes!

Compare: “*The butler stood by the door and called the guests’ names*” and “*The butler stood by the door and called guests names.*”

Compare “*I’m sorry you can’t come with us.*” and “*I am sorry, you can’t come with us.*”

Compare “*Thirty-odd people*” and “*Thirty odd people*”.

The Oracle at Delphi told an ancient Greek warrior:
shalt go, thou shalt return never, by war shalt thou perish.”

“Thou

The Greek misunderstood the prophesy as:
shalt go, thou shalt return, never by war shalt thou perish.”

“Thou

Needless to say, it wasn't a happy ending for the unlucky Greek warrior.

Funny Aspects of English

Amphiboly:

-noun, plural *am-phil-o-lies*.

ambiguity of speech, especially from uncertainty of the grammatical construction rather than of the meaning of the words.

Also called ***amphibology***.

e.g., A notice at a restaurant reads, “*If you think that the waiters are rude, you must see the manager.*” Does it mean that the manager is ruder than the waiters are?

Positive words in disuse and negative words in dominance:

There are many words in English language which are used in a negative sense and the positive components are mostly in disuse. Why so?

Positive words in disuse	Dominant negative words
<i>advertent</i>	<i>inadvertent</i>
<i>biotic</i>	<i>antibiotic</i>
<i>canny</i>	<i>uncanny</i>
<i>clement</i>	<i>inclement</i>
<i>conscionable</i>	<i>unconscionable</i>
<i>corrigible</i>	<i>incorrigible</i>
<i>delible</i>	<i>indelible</i>
<i>domitable</i>	<i>indomitable</i>
<i>evitable</i>	<i>inevitable</i>
<i>furl</i>	<i>unfurl</i>
<i>kempt</i>	<i>unkempt</i>
<i>odorant</i>	<i>deodorant</i>
<i>peccable</i>	<i>impeccable</i>
<i>pervious</i>	<i>impervious</i>
<i>wieldy</i>	<i>unwieldy</i>

Innovation and modernism:

Using some innocuous English words in casual conversations; totally deviating from the originally intended meaning is quite widespread. Who else can do this better than the Americans! This phenomenon is quite contagious. What is common practice, especially the American version, becomes global standard in due course. Let me share some of my experience. Recently, I visited USA to spend a few happy days with my grand children; Arjun and Anika. My grandson, Arjun had just got into middle school and was pretty excited about the new academic environment; and the associated trials and tribulations. It was time for an image make over. Apart from practicing tennis and learning “tae-kwon-do” (a type of martial art), he considered sporting some impressive attire. Consequently, I accompanied him to a mall to shop for a new pair of shoes, a jacket, and a back-pack. We had to choose an appropriate brand. He said that it would be ‘*cool*’ to wear Nike brand or Reebok stuff. I asked him if he had any idea of the prices involved. He said that the price of each of these items was ‘*like*’ US \$ 60 or so. The usage of the words ‘*cool*’ and ‘*like*’ here sounded inappropriate to me, who belongs to the old school of thought. He educated me on the intent and sensibleness of using such words here, which was commonplace. I asked him to look around and select suitable items while I fetched a cup of coffee for myself. It was time to modernize my English! I thought it would look ‘*cool*’ if I walk around with a ‘*hot*’ cup of coffee in my hand – STARBUCKS brand, of course.

Pause and ponder:

We are constrained to be in amazement at the distinctiveness of English language in which:

A *wise guy* is not same as a *wise man*.
The alarm goes *off* by going *on*.
You sink *slowly* in *quick* sand.
Your house can burn *up* as it burns *down*.
You can fill *in* a form by filling it *out*.
You can climb *up* as well as climb *down*.
You can *ship* by *truck* but send cargo by ship.
Boxing *rings* are *square*.

Exercise:

1. What is a tautology? State a few examples.
2. What is a tautonym? State a few examples.
3. What is a homograph? State a few examples.
4. Construct a sentence to demonstrate the concept of ‘*Amphiboly*.’

Epilogue: Usage and Abusage



You have, by now, must have learned many English words, difficult and not so difficult!

However, you have to use them properly and avoid abusage. This chapter throws light on some common errors amounting to various degrees of abusage of the English language.

A language may undergo some metamorphism by usage or abusage by its users over a period. Ironically, certain abusage of the language has indeed contributed to the development and modernization of the language. Paradoxically, even slang is more or less formalized, albeit with some implied quarantine. Who is enforcing the standard form of English? Users of course! If you cannot beat them, you join them! With the advent of computers, the software community is constantly trying to twist the existing words besides introducing new terminology. It is also to be noted that English is already the global language and more and more countries speaking different languages are trying to adopt and adapt English in their territories. It is but natural that they would transplant some words of their own language into English. Be it usage or abusage, it will be indistinguishable from the originally approved language form. We cannot stop this infiltration, and all we can do is to keep it under control.

Regularization of foreign words and incorporation into English is a pragmatic option. Let us hope that it is for the good of the English language. Let us call it enrichment of the language. Time will tell!

Most of the abusage may even go unnoticed in normal course of daily life, media included. However, in a genuine literary work one has to be careful with usage of words and phrases. The critics would expose any abusage; it is their job to do so. So beware!

Epilogue: Usage and Abusage

English may be a wonderful tool for writers, but it can be a devious one as well. Questions of usage often arise, and they can be dicey ones. English is in a state of flux and this usage problem is further accentuated.

Let us start with ‘*a*’ and ‘*an*’.

? *a and an:*

Examples: *a* sanitary sewer overflow; *an* SSO (Sanitary Sewer Overflow); *an* hour; *a* ewe; *a* one-armed bandit; *an* heir; *a* unicorn (unicorn begins with ‘*yu*’, a consonant sound).

We use “*a*” even if a word starts with an vowel-alphabet such as *ewe* or *unicorn* - if it begins with a consonant sound. (“*yu*” in this case)

Wrong → *an ewe*, *an unicorn*

Right → *a ewe*, *a unicorn*

? *a.m and p.m*

It is wrong to say “at 6 a.m. in the morning.” or “at 6 p.m in the evening.”

The words “morning” and “evening” are superfluous here.

Just say, “at 6 a.m” or “at 6 p.m”

? *Ability and Capacity:*

Compare these two sentences.

- I have the *ability* to write a book in English.
- I have the *capacity* to write 10 books in a year.

There is a subtle difference between these words. They are not interchangeable.

Ability is the power to do something or act physically, mentally, legally, morally, financially, etc. e.g. The water tank has the ability to resist corrosion.

Capacity is the ability to receive, contain, or produce in quantitative terms. e.g. The water tank has a capacity to hold 100 liters.

? *Abnormal, subnormal and supra-normal:*

Abnormal refers to any large deviation from normal or standard. It can mean either below normal or above normal. It can lead to ambiguity in certain situations.

If you want to be specific, you need to use either “*subnormal*” or “*supra-normal*.”

Though the words “*normal*” and “*standard*” appear to be synonymous, they are not interchangeable. “*substandard*” implies bad quality whereas “*subnormal*” conveys only a sense of deviation.

? *Above, below and beneath:*

Epilogue: Usage and Abusage

It is a common error to use the word “**above**” as an alternative to “**more than**”; and the word “**below**” as an alternative to “**less than**.”

Compare these two sentences.

- Proper usage → A meter is more than a yard in measurement.
- Abusage → A meter is **above** a yard in measurement.

Does this mean that a meter is physically on top of the yard in the former case?

“**Above**” and “**below**” may refer to what is stated earlier or later in official and technical writings. e.g. “*The above statement ...*” or “*The information given below ...*” In most cases, it may convey right sense in official or technical writings.

Envision the absurdity of such writings being used for speech making! It does not make sense in spoken communication. It would be more appropriate to write as “The preceding statement ...” or “The following information ...”

The word “**Beneath**” covers a narrower field than the word “**below**”.

It gives the following senses:

- Directly under as in “**beneath** the roof” or “**Beneath** the moon ...”
- Immediately under, in contact with the under-side as in “no time to stand **beneath** the boughs ...”

? About:

You might have heard someone say, “The show starts at **about** 6 PM or 7 PM.” This is a very loose way of saying.

It would be better to say, “The show begins at **about** 6-30 PM.” to convey the right sense.

Alternatively, you can say, “The show starts at either 6 PM or 7 M.” to be more precise.

? Act :

Act as a verb should be correctly followed by an adverb and not by an adjective.

Compare these two sentences:

- He *acted stupid*.
- He *acted stupidly*.

The former sentence is wrong. The latter is in order.

? Adapt and Adopt:

These words have different meanings.

To **adapt** a thing is “*to change it for a purpose.*”

To **adopt** is “*to accept it unchanged and then use it.*”

Compare these two sentences:

Epilogue: Usage and Abusage

- He **adapted** the machine to suit his requirement, by making certain modifications. (note: you do not adopt a machine)
- He **adopted** a child. (note: you do not adapt a child)

? Advice and Advise:

Advice is a noun and **advise** is a verb.

Say, "He was advised to exercise regularly."

Don't say, ["He was **advised** to exercise regularly."]

However, you can say "He heeded the **advice** and exercised regularly."

? Almost never:

"Never" is "**never**" and cannot be "**almost never**."

"**Almost never**" is loose and feeble.

e.g. It is incorrect to say, "I **almost never** criticized the government."

It is enough to say, "I **never** criticized the government."

? "Altogether" and "All together":

These words have different meanings and not interchangeable. Any misuse can lead to ambiguity.

"**Altogether**" means, "*entirely*" or "*on the whole*."

"**All together**" implies "collocation" or "*unanimity of individuals*."

Do not say, "*They came altogether*." Instead, say, "*They came all together*."

It is in order to say, "*They rejected the suggestion altogether*."

It is wrong to say, "*They rejected the suggestion all together*."

? "America" and "American":

Do not use America and USA synonymously. If you do, you are ignoring Mexico, Canada, and all the South **American** nations.

A person from USA is an **American**; but an American does not mean that the person is from USA. Got it!

? and / but:

It is a misconception that the coordinating conjunction '**And**' cannot begin a sentence. **And** the idea that '**And**' must not begin a sentence, or even a paragraph, is a mere superstition.

And the same applies to '**but**'.

But the best of authors find it expedient to begin a sentence with '**and**' or '**but**'. (*this sentence starts with 'But' and ends with 'but'*)

And this misconception is perpetrated by the school masters, probably to counteract the elementary-school students' propensity to begin every sentence with '**But**' or '**And**'. (this sentence starts with '**And**' and ends with '**and**')
But the myth is alive and kicking among the English pack!

Epilogue: Usage and Abusage

And we should not join them.

But we should beat them if possible.

? ... and all:

Do not end a sentence with “**and all**” or insert “and all” in a sentence; it is a needless appendix.

Abusage → “I ate rice, curry, **and all** at the restaurant.”

? and / or:

It is in order to use “**and/or**” in legal and official documents. The general writing should not be polluted with “**and/or**”.

? as to:

It is needless to insert “**as to**” before a “why” or “how”.

Abusage → “I cannot understand **as to** why he is angry.”

? Cause and Reason:

Usage → What are the **causes** for the downfall of Roman Empire?

Abusage → What are the reasons for the downfall of Roman Empire?

A **cause** is that which produces an effect.

A person or thing that acts, happens, or exists in such a way that some specific thing happens as a result; the producer of an effect:

*e.g. You have been the **cause** of much anxiety. What was the **cause** of the accident?*

A **reason** is that which is advanced in order to explain the effect or a result.

A **reason** is a statement presented in justification or explanation of a belief or action.

*e.g. He was consulted about the problem by **reason** of his experience and expertise.*

? Climate and Weather:

Weather is the state of the atmosphere with respect to wind, temperature, cloudiness, moisture, pressure, etc.

Climate is the average of all weather conditions in a long period.

? Commerce, Trade, and business:

There is a tendency to use these words synonymously! Note the difference(s) in meanings of these terms.

Trade is the act or process of buying, selling, or exchanging commodities, at either wholesale or retail, within a country or between countries: *domestic trade*; *foreign trade*.

Epilogue: Usage and Abusage

While "**business**" refers to the value-creating activities of an organization for profit, **commerce** means the whole system of an economy that constitutes an environment for business. **Commerce** refers to interchange of goods or commodities, especially on a *large scale* nationally or internationally.

? Word usage:

Commerce primarily expresses the abstract notions of buying and selling, whereas **trade** may refer to the exchange of a specific class of goods ("the sugar trade", for example), or to a specific act of exchange (as in "a trade on the stock-exchange"). **Business** can refer to an organization set up for the purpose of engaging in manufacturing or exchange, as well as serving as a loose synonym of the abstract collective "commerce and industry".

? Daughter-in-law, son-in-law, mother-in-law, father-in-law etc.:

The correct plural of daughter-in-law is "**daughters-in-law**" and not "**daughter-in-laws**". So is the case with the other terms.

? Data, Information, knowledge and wisdom:

Data is a collection of unorganized and unprocessed facts. **Data** is a set of discrete facts about events, measurements, records of transactions etc. However, data is a prerequisite to **information**.

The word **information** is derived from the word **inform** which means, "to give shape to"; information means shaping the **data** to arrive at a meaning in the eyes of the perceiver. **Information** is an aggregation of data that makes decision making easier.

Knowledge is a higher level of abstraction that resides in people's minds. Knowledge is derived from information in the same way information is derived from data. It may be viewed as an understanding of information based on its perceived importance or relevance to the problem area. **Knowledge** includes perception, skills, training, common sense, and experience. It is the sum total of our perceptive processes that helps us to draw meaningful conclusions.

Wisdom is accumulated knowledge or erudition or enlightenment. It is the ability to apply knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense, or insight prudently and sensibly. A basic philosophical definition of **wisdom** is to make the best use of knowledge. The opposite of **wisdom** is **folly**.

? Device and Devise:

Device:

- 1) a thing made for a particular purpose; an invention or contrivance, especially a mechanical or electrical one.
- 2) a plan or scheme for effecting a purpose.

Epilogue: Usage and Abusage

Devise: to contrive, plan, or elaborate; invent from existing principles or ideas: *to devise a method.*

? Each and every:

“**Each and every**” is inaccurately used with a plural pronoun by many people. Usually **each** or **every** can be changed to **all** or **both** without injuring the sense.
grateful to **each and every** one of you.”
or **every**, as stated below.
to **each** of you” (or)
every one of you.”

Abusage → “I am
We must use either **each**
“I am grateful
“I am grateful to

? Emigrant and Immigrant:

Emigrant is one who is leaving his own for another country.
is one who is arriving from another country.
both an emigrant and immigrant, but not at the same time.

Immigrant
A person can be

? Endemic and Epidemic:

Endemic: natural to or characteristic of a specific people or place; native; indigenous; belonging exclusively or confined to a particular place..

*e.g. An **endemic** disease is habitually prevalent in a particular area; a fever **endemic** to the tropic; countries where high unemployment is **endemic** ...*

Epidemic: Also, ep·i·dem·i·cal. (of a disease) affecting many persons at the same time, and spreading from person to person in a locality where the disease is not permanently prevalent.

? Ended and Ending:

Ended refers to the past were as **Ending** refers to the present or future.

Ended is “that has come to an end.”

Ending is “that is ending” or “that is about to end”.

e.g. Financial year ended 31st March 2011; Financial year ending 31st March 2012.

? few / a few:

“**few**” usually implies antithesis with “**many**”.

not many but more than one: *few artists live luxuriously*; a small number or amount: *send me a few.*

Idiom: quite a few, a fairly large number; many: *There were quite a few interesting things to do.*

Epilogue: Usage and Abusage

“a few” implies antithesis with *“none at all”*.

This phrase can differ slightly from *few* used alone, which means *“not many.”* For example, *The party was to end at eight, but a few stayed on* indicates that a small number of guests remained, whereas *The party began at eight, and few attended* means that hardly any guests came.

? fill in or fill out:

These two phrases are not interchangeable.

Fill in is to insert into speech or writing, something that will occupy a vacancy.

e.g. He left the date blank to **fill in** later; to supply missing or desired information: *Fill in the facts of your business experience*; to fill with some material: *to fill in a crack with putty*.

Fill out is to enlarge or extend to the desired size or limit; to complete (a document, list, etc.) by supplying missing or desired information.

? Get:

Get should not be used much in formal writing, but may be replaced by words such as *obtain*, *receive*, *become*, *buy* etc. appropriately. Some exceptions are *“get well”*, *“get married”* etc.

? Graffiti / Graffito:

Graffiti is plural and **graffito** is the rarely used singular. Do not use **graffiti** with singular verbs or pronouns.

? Grammar / Calendar:

Do not spell these words as *“grammer”* or *“Calender”*.

? Hanged vs. Hung:

Hanged is applied regarding capital punishment only.

e.g.

The traitor was **hanged**. (not *“hung”*)

Hung is applied for to things.

e.g. The picture was **hung**. (not *“hanged”*)

? in- and Un- (prefixes):

In adjectives; **in** and **un** are used as prefixes. In general, **in** is the prefix that goes with words of Latin origin; **un** is the prefix that goes with the words of Teutonic origin (i.e. from Old English, Scandinavian, German). Thus, *infelicitous*, but *unhappy*. Most words with -ed and -ing form their negatives with un- : unexpected, unassuming etc.

Epilogue: Usage and Abusage

? Informant and Informer:

Informant is one who gives information on a stated or implied occasion.
one who lays information against another, mostly related to spying.

Informer is

? Italics:

Italics must be used in moderation. Their most legitimate purpose is to indicate emphasis in dialogue, and everywhere else, to indicate foreign words and phrases and titles. A title should not be partially italicized; i.e. the entire title must be italicized.

Usage → Nannaya Bhat's great work: Mahabharata in Telugu.
"Nannaya Bhat's great work: Mahabharata in Telugu."

Abusage →

? It and It's:

Its is the genitive (possessive) of **it**. **Its** = *of it*
It's = "it is" or "it has"

Usage → **It's** essential to know of **its** importance.
→ **Its** essential to know of **it's** importance.

Abusage

? Judgement and judgment:

Both spellings are permissible. The former is British and the latter is American.

? Kneeled and Knelt:

Both are permissible as the preterite (a word in the past tense) and past participle of *kneel*.

? Later and Latter:

Later is the comparative of late (in time); **latest** is the superlative. e.g. I will come **later**. **Latter** is the second of two things mentioned, having the sense "near the end" as in "**latter** part of the year".

? May and Might:

Both '**may have**' and '**might have**' are used for past possibilities, but with a difference; '**may have**' implies that the possibility is still open whereas '**might have**' means that the possibility no longer exists.

man **might have** been only a vegetarian.
have been only a vegetarian.

Usage → The pre-historic

Abusage → The pre-historic man **may**

Epilogue: Usage and Abusage

? Mister and Messrs:

Mister: a title of respect prefixed to a man's name or position: *Mr. Lawson; Mr. President.*

Messrs = plural of **Mister**.

However, '**messrs**' should be confined to commerce.

? Mrs / Ms:

'**Mrs**' implies married status of a woman.

'**Ms**', pronounced as '**miz**', conceals marital status of a woman.

? Never expected:

Never say "**never expected to...**"

Instead say "**expected never to...**"

Abusage → I never expected to see him here.

Usage → I expected never to see him here.

? News:

News is singular. (Not plural)

Usage → No **news** is good news.

Abusage → The news are good today.

NEWS is the substitute word (kind of abbreviation) for information coming from all directions viz. North, East, West, and South.

? On and Upon:

On and **upon** are near synonymous.

Upon is stronger, more formal, and more impressive than **on**.

"*It depends upon what you do*" is stronger and more elegant than "*It depends on what you do.*"

In writing '**upon**' is often preferred to '**on**'.

However, there are situations where '**on**' is the only possibility; as in "*on Tuesday*", "*on foot*", "*on holiday*" etc.

? Pay:

Note the variation in use of '**pay**'.

- **Pay down** is to pay a part of what is due or pay on the spot.
- **Pay off** is to pay a person in full and discharge him / her.
- **Pay up** is to pay in full for something or to discharge a debt in full.
- **Pay over** is to hand money to a person in part or full.
- **Pay away** is to pay unexpectedly, reluctantly, or with difficulty: as in "*pay away a bill.*"

Epilogue: Usage and Abusage

- **Pay out** is to pay a sum from one's account or a fund, to get rid of a person: as in "*pay out a difficult partner in business, his share of capital.*"

This usage of the word '**pay**' is quite intimidating. You may have to refer to this book when you have no other option but to pay for something or the other. Of course, the best option is not to pay at all!

? re- and re (v) :

Most compound words with '**re**' are spelt as one word; but hyphenated when the following word begins with character '**e**': as in '*re-enact*', '*re-enter*', '*re-elect*' etc. It is in order to say '*reword*', '*recall*', '*recover*' etc.

? Review and Revue:

Review: a new appraisal or evaluation; a periodical publication containing articles on current events or affairs, books, art, etc.: *a literary review*; a second or repeated view of something; a general survey of something, especially in words; a report or account of something; critical article or report on a book, play, recital, or the like.

Revue: a variety show with topical sketches and songs and dancing and comedians; a form of theatrical entertainment in which recent events, popular fads, etc., are parodied; any entertainment featuring skits, dances, and songs.

? Subtract:

Subtract is often misspelled as "**Substract**"

In current usage the word, '**subtract**' is virtually confined to mathematics.

? Surprised, astonished, amazed, and astounded:

These words are nearly synonymous and are used as adjectives, expressing a feeling of wonder. However, these four words express the same feeling of wonder, but with ascending order of intensity.

Please note the sense of intensity in the following sentences.

Usage → I am **surprised** to learn that the train is arriving late by an hour.

Abusage → I am **amazed** to learn that the train is arriving late by an hour.

Usage → I am **astounded** at the possible consequences of meltdown at the nuclear power plant

Abusage → I am **surprised** to learn of possible consequences of meltdown at the nuclear power plant.

Usage → I am **astounded** to learn that the world is ending in 2012.

Abusage → I am **surprised** to learn that the world is ending in 2012.

? Upward and Upwards:

Upward is mainly an adjective, but often functions as an adverb. e.g. *upward* adjustment.

Upwards is an adverb only.

Properly, *upwards of* = “slightly or rather more than ...” as in “*upwards of* a hundred.”

? -ward and -wards:

‘*-ward*’ is a suffix, both adjectival and adverbial, as in “*wayward behaviour*” or “*onward journey*” etc.

‘*-wards*’ is adverbial only, as in “*next month onwards*”.

? Xmas:

Xmas, pronounced as ‘*Exmas*’, is a contraction of Christmas, barely allowable in its use in writing.

Merry Xmas, anyway!

Conclusion:

Everyone can have a superior vocabulary. The language is rich in words, and the words are full of ideas, and no one has a monopoly or copyright on any of them. Yet many persons are verbal cripples. Why? Lack of ability? Lack of time? Lack of learning resources? These are the obvious reasons put forward - and every one of them is insufficient and inexcusable. The only possible reason is lack of discipline or lack of patience - or both. The work you do on these pages can change your life for the better and it is no exaggeration. Please return to this book as often as you can and devote some time to master the words. The material for such mastery is in your hands.

Here are the steps leading to mastery of words.

- **Step 1:** You must be actively receptive to new words. Words won’t come chasing after you! You must train yourself to be on constant lookout, in your reading and listening, for any new words that you may not know.
- **Step 2:** You must read more. Not just today! Read books, newspapers, journals and the like day after day - all your life.
- **Step 3:** You must learn to consciously add to your own vocabulary the new words you come across in your reading and listening. When you see an unfamiliar word in a book or magazine, do not skip over it impatiently. Instead, pause for a moment - and try to understand the contextual meaning of the word. Reach for the dictionary and probe further. Keep an open mind for new ideas. Every word you know is the translation of a new idea. Students at universities of higher learning have tremendous vocabularies because they are required to expose themselves constantly to new ideas of learning. You need to do the same.

Epilogue: Usage and Abusage

- **Step 5:** You must set a goal. If you learn just by a natural process, maybe, you can add to your vocabulary a hundred words a year. By a conscious effort, you can add a thousand words a year - at the rate of about just three words a day! It is 'easy' or 'difficult' - it is just a matter of your motivation level and perception.

And mastery over words is often the most distinguishing attribute of a person.

Exercise:

A) Compare the words:

1. 'maybe' vis-à-vis 'may be'
2. 'advice' vis-à-vis 'advise'
3. 'later' vis-à-vis 'latter'
4. 'few' vis-à-vis 'a few'
5. 'on' vis-à-vis 'upon'
6. 'climate' vis-à-vis 'weather'
7. 'endemic' vis-à-vis 'epidemic'

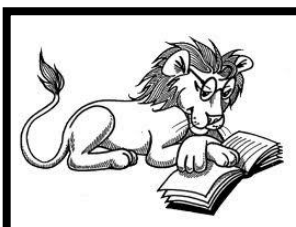
Form sentences using the above words

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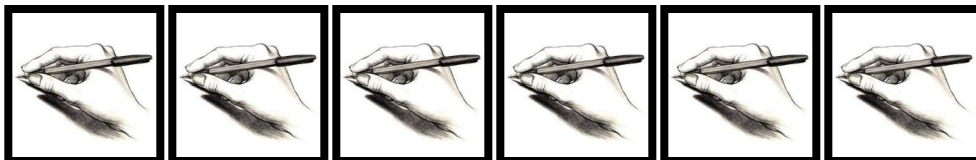
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Notes

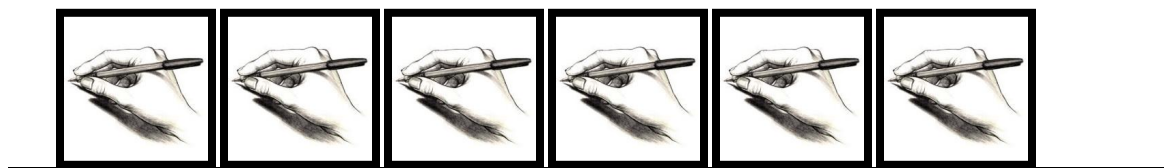
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