

Knowledge/Growth Support

100 Common English Usage Problems

A Guide from www.kgsupport.com

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Introduction

English is today's *lingua franca*; its evolution is driven by the current demands for information and the need for global communication. English serves as the native language for nearly 400 million people, a second language for another 400 million people, and a foreign language to 800 million people across the globe. It has unarguably become an important academic and professional tool. It is recognized as the most important language through which the increasingly mobile international community interacts and learns.

However, despite its worldwide use, English is still considered the most difficult European language to learn and read, primarily because its unique characteristics hinder non-native English speakers from obtaining a strong command of it. English syntax, with its strict subject-verb-object structure, is particularly difficult to grasp. English is also unique in its uses of articles. When combined with the fact that English is an unphonetic language and possesses other small peculiarities, it is a daunting challenge to learn and master.

Below, we have compiled a list of common English usage problems that can cause confusion in both writing and speaking. We also provide corresponding examples to illustrate these problems and demonstrate proper usage. Read each item carefully, and note what you feel requires special attention. As you become more familiar with the contents of our booklet and master them, you may refer to individual items from time to time as needed. Remember, the only way to develop a good command of the English language is to master its rules and apply them accordingly in your everyday speech and writing.



100 Common English Usage Problems

1. **a, an** The article **a** is used before consonant sounds, and the article **an** before vowel sounds. Words beginning with **h, o,** or **u** may have either a consonant sound or a vowel sound.

Example:

a histology class (*h*-sound)

a one-way path (*w*-sound)

a uniform look (*y*-sound)

2. **accept, except** **Accept**, a verb, means “to receive.” **Except**, a preposition, means “leaving out” or “other than.”

Example:

VERB- She did not **accept** the job offer for flimsy reasons.

PREPOSITION- We were all excited about the reunion, **except** Maggie.

3. **accuse, allege** **Accuse** means “to blame” or “to bring a charge against.” **Allege** means “to claim something that has not been proven.”

Example:

He was **accused** of treason, which he vehemently denied.

It was **alleged** that he secretly cooperated with the Japanese during the war.



4. *adapt, adopt* *Adapt*, a verb, means “to change.” *Adopt*, also a verb, means “to take as one’s own.”

Example:

We were finally able to **adapt** to the cold climate of the area.

The group **adopted** the strategy and implemented it in the entire unit.

5. *advice, advise* *Advice* is a noun meaning “an opinion.” *Advise* is a verb meaning “to give an opinion to.”

Example:

I miss the pieces of **advice** that mother used to bombard me with.

She has always **advised** me to remain strong and independent.

6. *affect, effect* *Affect* is almost always a verb meaning “to influence.” *Effect*, usually a noun, means “result.” Occasionally, *effect* is a verb meaning “to bring about” or “to cause.”

Example:

I would not let my personal problems **affect** the quality of my work.

The **effect** of the earthquake on Beijing was disastrous.

She **effected** policies that benefited the entire organization.



7. *aggravate* *Aggravate* means “to make worse.” Avoid using this word as a synonym of “annoy.”

Example:

LESS ACCEPTABLE: She was severely **aggravated** by his rude behavior.

PREFERRED: Delaying your visit to the doctor will only **aggravate** your ailment.

8. *ain't* *Ain't*, originally a contraction of **AM NOT**, is not considered acceptable in standard English. Avoid using it in all writing and speaking.

Example:

NONSTANDARD: I **ain't** going to the party tonight.

CORRECT: I **am not** going to the party tonight.

9. *allot, a lot* *Allot*, a verb, means “to divide in parts” or “to give out in shares.” *A lot* is an informal expression meaning “a great many” or “a great amount.” Avoid using it in formal writing.

Example:

VERB: My husband **allotted** a portion of his monthly pay for his sister’s matriculation.

INFORMAL: He has **a lot** of relatives in the suburbs to support.

FORMAL: He has **many** relatives in the suburbs to support.



10. *all ready, already* *All ready* is an expression functioning as an adjective and meaning “ready.” *Already* is an adverb meaning “by or before this time” or “even now.”

Example:

ADJECTIVE: We are **all ready** to listen to the proposition.

ADVERB: We have **already** arrived at a decision.

11. *all right, alright* *Alright* is nonstandard spelling. Always use the two-word form in your writing.

Example:

NONSTANDARD: It is **alright** with the group that you take your share in advance.

CORRECT: It is **all right** with the group that you take your share in advance.

12. *all together, altogether* *All together* means “all at once.” *Altogether* means “completely” or “in all.”

Example:

CORRECT: **All together**, the members of the Parliament moved that the motion be reconsidered.

CORRECT: They did not agree **altogether** that the bill was worth passing.

13. *A.M., P.M.* *A.M.* refers to the hours before noon and *P.M.* to the hours after noon.

Do not spell out numbers when you use these abbreviations, and do not use such phrases as “in the morning” or “in the afternoon” with them.



INCORRECT: We will leave for Calgary at nine **A.M.** in the morning.

CORRECT: We will leave for Calgary at 9:00 **A.M.**

14. *among, between* *Among* and *between* are both prepositions. *Among* always implies three or more. *Between* is generally used with just two things.

Example:

John was certainly **among** the most talented students in his class.

John always comes **between** Frank and myself.

15. *amount, number* Use *amount* with quantities that cannot be counted. Use *number* with things that can be counted.

Example:

a small **amount** of lotion, a large **amount** of profit

a **number** of books, a **number** of delegates

16. *anxious* *Anxious* means “worried,” “uneasy,” or “fearful.” Do not use it as a substitute for “eager.”

AMBIGUOUS: We are always **anxious** to meet new friends.

CLEAR: We are always **anxious** about meeting new friends.

We are always **eager** to meet new friends.



17. *anyone, any one, everyone, every one* *Anyone and everyone* mean “any person” and “every person,” respectively. *Any one* means “any single person (or thing).” *Every one* means “every single person (or thing).”

Example:

Anyone may try out the new dish.

Any one of these dishes may be tried out.

Everyone did not like the dish.

Every one of the dishes was horrible.

18. *anyway, anywhere, everywhere, nowhere, somewhere* These adverbs should never end in –s.

NONSTANDARD: It does not matter if the host refuses because the group will still go **anyways**.

CORRECT: It does not matter if the host refuses because the group will still go **anyway**.

19. *as* Do not use this conjunction to mean “because” or “since.”

LESS ACCEPTABLE: **As** she was terribly sick, she was not able to join the competition.

PREFERRED: **Because** she was terribly sick, she was not able to join the competition.

20. *as to* *As to* is awkward. Replace it with about/on.

NONSTANDARD: There are a number of theories **as to** how life began.

CORRECT: There are a number of theories **about** how life began.



21. *at* Do not use *at* after “where.” Simply eliminate it.

NONSTANDARD: Do the visitors know **where** the train station is **at**?

CORRECT: Do the visitors know **where** the train station is?

22. *at about* Avoid using *at* with *about*. Simply eliminate *at* or *about*.

LESS ACCEPTABLE: The delegates arrived **at about** noon.

PREFERRED: The delegates arrived **at** noon.

23. *awful, awfully* *Awful* is used informally to mean “extremely bad.” *Awfully* is used informally to mean “very.” Both modifiers are overused and should be replaced with more descriptive words. In formal writing, awful should be used only to mean “inspiring fear.”

INFORMAL: Mary looked **awful** when she was hospitalized.

BETTER: Mary looked **pale and weak** when she was hospitalized.

INFORMAL: Mary was **awfully** weak.

BETTER: Mary was **very** weak.

24. *awhile, a while* *Awhile* is an adverb, which in itself means “for a while.” A *while* is an article and a noun, and is usually used after the preposition “for.”

Example:

Rest **awhile** if the driver is not yet around.



Stay for a **while** and keep me company while you wait for the driver.

25. **beat, win** **Beat** means “to overcome (an opponent).” **Win** means “to achieve victory in.” Do not use **win** in place of **beat**.

NONSTANDARD: The Tigers **won** against the Yankees in the final game.

CORRECT: The Tigers **beat** the Yankees in the final game.

26. **because** Do not use **because** after “the reason.” Say “The reason is....that” or reword the sentence.

NONSTANDARD: **The reason** I resigned **is because** I was not prepared for the job.

CORRECT: **The reason** I resigned **is that** I was not prepared for the job.

I resigned **because** I was not prepared for the job.

27. **being as, being that** Avoid using either expression. Use “since” or “because” instead.

NONSTANDARD: **Being that** it was raining outside, we cancelled our activity for the day.

CORRECT: **Because it** was raining outside, we cancelled our activity for the day.

28. **beside, besides** As prepositions, these two words have different meanings and cannot be interchanged. **Beside** means “at the side of” or “close to.” **Besides** means “in addition to” and “except for” or “apart from,” but should not be confused with the conjunction **moreover**, which will be discussed later.



Example:

Linda was **beside** me during the entire course of the interview.

Besides my educational background, I was asked about my job experiences.

29. **bring, take** *Bring* means “to carry from a distant place to a nearer one.” *Take* means the opposite: “to carry from a near place to a more distant one.”

EXAMPLE:

It is lunch time so please **bring** the lunch boxes here.

It is lunch time so please **take** the lunch boxes to the kids.

30. **bunch** *Bunch* means “a number of things of the same kind.” Avoid using this word to mean “group.”

PREFERRED: A **group** of professionals formed their own labor union.

They brought a **bunch** of fruits with them.

31. **burst, bust, busted** *Burst* is the standard present, past, and past participle of the verb *burst*. *Bust and busted* are nonstandard forms.

NONSTANDARD: Marco will **bust** if he takes one more bite!

CORRECT: Marco will **burst** if he takes one more bite!



32. *but what* Do not use *but what*. Instead, use *that*.

NONSTANDARD: I do not doubt **but what** I will succeed.

CORRECT: I do not doubt **that** I will succeed.

33. *can, may* Use *can* to mean “to have the ability to.” Use *may* to mean “to have permission to” or “to be possible or likely to.”

ABILITY: You **can** certainly carry that load.

PERMISSION: Yes, you **may** use it.

POSSIBILITY: You **may** overcome that challenge.

34. *cannot help but* This is a nonstandard expression. Use *cannot help* plus a gerund instead.

NONSTANDARD: I **cannot help but** think of all the misery I went through.

CORRECT: I **cannot help** wondering how I was able to solve all my problems.

35. *clipped words* Avoid clipped or shortened words, such as *gym, phone, and photo* in formal writing.

INFORMAL: I kept a **photo** of you and your family all these years.

FORMAL: I kept a **photograph** of you and your family all these years.



36. *condemn, condone* *Condemn* means “to express strong disapproval of.” *Condone* means “to pardon or overlook.”

Example:

She was **condemned** for betraying her own country.

The government **condoned** her cruel acts.

37. *continual, continuous* *Continual* means “occurring again and again in succession.” *Continuous* means “occurring without interruption.”

Example:

His **continual** tardiness caused his dismissal from his post.

His **continuous** absence from his post caused his dismissal.

38. *different from, different than* *Different from* is preferred.

LESS ACCEPTABLE: Her idea of marriage is **different than** mine.

PREFERRED: Her idea of marriage is **different from** mine.

39. *doesn't, don't* Do not use *don't* with third-person singular subjects. Use *doesn't* instead.

NONSTANDARD: She **don't** know where she is heading to.

STANDARD: She **does not** know where she is going to.

MOST FREQUENTLY USED: She **doesn't** know where she is going.



40. *done Done* is the past participle of the verb *do*. It should always follow a helping verb.

NONSTANDARD: Mr. Jones' children **always done** well in school.

CORRECT: Mr. Jones' children **have always done** well in school.

41. *due to Due to* means "*caused by*" and should be used only when the words *caused by* can logically be substituted.

NONSTANDARD: The meeting was postponed **due to** the gloomy weather.

CORRECT: The postponement of the meeting was **due to** the gloomy weather.

42. *due to the fact that* Replace this wordy expression with *since* and *because*.

LESS ACCEPTABLE: **Due to the fact** that we were late, we lost the game by default.

PREFERRED: We lost the game by default **because** we were late.

43. *each other, one another Each other* and *one another* are usually interchangeable.

At times, however, *each other* is more logically used in reference to only two, and *one another*, in reference to more than two.

Example:

Jesus taught us to love **one another**.

The couple held **each other's** hand as they walked down the aisle.



44. *emigrate, immigrate* *Emigrate* means “to leave a country for a new residency.”

Immigrate means “to enter a country to establish residency.”

Example:

During the war, many Vietnamese **emigrated** from the country.

Many Vietnamese **immigrated** to the United States.

45. *enthused, enthusiastic* *Enthused* is nonstandard. Replace it with *enthusiastic*.

NONSTANDARD: The employees were all **enthused** about the new work arrangement.

CORRECT: The employees were all **enthusiastic** about the new work arrangement.

46. *farther, further* *Farther* refers to distance. *Further* means “additional” or “to a greater degree of extent.”

Example:

Grandmother’s place is **farther** than what we expected.

Grandmother asked us **further** how we were able to get to her place.

47. *fewer, less* Use *fewer* with things that can be counted. Use *less* with qualities and quantities that cannot be counted.

Example:

Fewer books, **fewer** complaints

Less trouble, **less** milk



48. **former, latter** *Former* refers to the first of two previously mentioned items. *Latter* refers to the second of the two.

Example:

We bought some food and new toys for the orphanage.

The **former** we gave to the orphanage employees; the **latter** we gave to the kids.

49. **get, got, gotten** These forms of the verb *get* are acceptable in standard English, but whenever possible, it is best to find a more specific word.

INFORMAL: **get** a permit, **got** a job, have **gotten** wealthier

BETTER: **obtain** a permit, **hired** for a job, have **acquired** wealth

50. **gone, went** *Gone* is the past participle of *go* and should be used as a verb only with a helping word. *Went* is the past form of *go* and is never used with a helping verb.

NONSTANDARD: Joe **gone** to see his family in Miami.

CORRECT: Joe **went** to see his family in Miami.

CORRECT: Joe **could have gone** to see his family in Miami.

51. **good, lovely, nice** Whenever possible, replace these weak and overused words with a more specific adjective.

WEAK: **good** explanation, **lovely** weather, **nice** clothes

BETTER: **elaborate** explanation, **warm** weather, **fashionable** clothes



52. ***hanged, hung*** Use ***hanged*** to mean “executed.” Use ***hung*** to mean “suspended.”

Example:

The traitor was **hanged** before his own countrymen.

Spider plants **hung** from the ceiling of the living room.

53. ***healthful, healthy*** Things are ***healthful***; people are ***healthy***.

LESS ACCEPTABLE: Tofu is **healthy** food.

PREFERRED: Tofu is **healthful** food.

54. ***if, whether*** These two subordinate conjunctions are interchangeable. When using ***whether***, it is not necessary to include ***or not*** after it.

Example: The diplomats were wondering **whether** (or **if**) they made the right proposition.

55. ***in, into*** ***In*** refers to position. ***Into*** suggests motion.

Position: Each piece of accessory was placed **in** the cabinet.

Motion: Please put all of your things **into** the drawer.

56. ***irregardless*** Avoid this word. Use ***regardless***.

NONSTANDARD: **Irregardless** of the election results, you are still our choice.

CORRECT: **Regardless** of the election results, you are still our choice.



57. *judicial, judicious* **Judicial** means “relating to the administration of justice.”
Judicious means “showing wisdom.”

Example:

The highest **judicial** body in the land is the Supreme Court.

The judge’s **judicious** decision earned for him much respect.

58. *just* When *just* is used as an adverb meaning “no more than,” it should be placed right before the word it modifies.

LESS ACCEPTABLE: **Just clean** the porch, not the garage.

PREFERRED: **Clean just** the porch, not the garage.

59. *kind of, sort of* Do not use *kind of* and *sort of* to mean “rather” or “somewhat.”

NONSTANDARD: Anne was **sort of** disappointed with her colleague’s performance.

CORRECT: Anne was **somewhat** disappointed with her colleague’s performance.

60. *kind of a, sort of a* Do not use *a* after *kind of* and *sort of*.

NONSTANDARD: Which **kind of a** book do you prefer?

CORRECT: Which **kind of** book do you prefer?

In addition, avoid such expressions as “this kind of clothes” or “these sorts of examinations.” If *kind* or *sort* is singular, the object of the preposition *of* should also be singular. If *kind* or *sort* is plural, the object of the preposition *of* should also be plural.

NONSTANDARD: this **kind of clothes**, these **sorts of examination**

CORRECT: this **kind of cloth**, these **sorts of examinations**

61. *lay, lie* *Lay* means “to put or set (something) down.” Its tenses are—*lay, laying, laid, and laid*—and are usually followed by a direct object. *Lie* means “to recline.” Its principal parts—*lie, lying, lay, and lain*—are never followed by a direct object.

LAY: **Lay** the vase on the desk.

They are **laying** the carpet tomorrow afternoon.

Jack gently **laid** the eggs in the container.

LIE: **Lie** down and rest for a few minutes.

The children are **lying** on the carpet.

They were so tired that they **lay** down to rest.

62. *learn, teach* *Learn* means “to acquire knowledge.” *Teach* means to impart knowledge to.”

Example:

I **learned** so much from my elementary English teacher.

My elementary English teacher used to **teach** me so much.

63. *leave, let* *Leave* means “to allow to remain.” *Let* means “to permit.”

NONSTANDARD: **Leave** me to do this on my own.

CORRECT: **Let** me do this on my own.



64. *like* **Like** is a preposition and should not be used in place of the conjunction *as*.

NONSTANDARD: He is wise **like** a monkey is wise.

CORRECT: He is wise **as** a monkey is wise.

65. *loose, lose* **Loose** is usually an adjective or part of such idioms as *cut loose*, *turn loose*, or *break loose*. **Lose** is always a verb, generally meaning “to miss from one’s possession.”

Example:

Grandma loves to wear **loose** clothes.

Lose this game, and you are out of the entire tournament.

66. *mad* In formal usage, the adjective **mad** means “insane.” Used informally, **mad** means “angry.”

INFORMAL: Jenny was so **mad** that she threw the book at her brother.

FORMAL: She was brought to the sanitarium because she was **mad**.

67. *maybe, may be* **Maybe** is an adverb meaning “perhaps.” **May be** is a helping verb and a verb.

ADVERB: **Maybe** we will make it to the meeting on time.

VERB: She **may be** permitted to use the conference room.



68. *moral, morale* *Moral* means good or virtuous; it also refers to the lesson or principle that can be learned from a story or an event. Meanwhile, *morale* refers to a mental condition or the state of the spirits of a person or a group of persons.

Example:

A *moral* individual is admired by people.

The *moral* of the fable was identified by the listeners easily.

After losing the game, the team's *morale* was low.

69. *moreover* Use the conjunction *moreover* to mean the same thing as *furthermore*. It is used to expound on a given idea and should not be confused with *besides* which, when used as a conjunction, also means *anyway* (other than to mean *in addition to*) and is more appropriate for informal use.

INCORRECT: Nurses are leaving the country for greener pastures. **Besides**, other professionals and skilled workers are following suit.

CORRECT: Nurses are leaving the country for greener pastures. **Moreover**, other professionals and skilled workers are following suit.

70. *of* Do not use *of* after a helping verb such as *should*, *would*, *could*, and *must*. Use *have* instead. Do not use *of* after *outside*, *inside*, *off*, and *atop*. Simply eliminate it.

NONSTANDARD: She **must of** remembered she had an appointment.

CORRECT: She **must have** remembered she had an appointment.

LESS ACCEPTABLE: The kid fell **off of** the high chair.



PREFERRED: The kid fell **off** the high chair.

71. **OK, O.K., okay** In informal writing, **OK, O.K.**, and **okay** are acceptably used to mean “all right.” However, do not use either the abbreviations or **okay** in formal writing.

INFORMAL: It is **okay** to bring your kids with you to the annual company outing.

FORMAL: It is **all right** to bring your kids with you to the annual company outing.

72. **only** **Only** should be placed in front of the word it logically modifies.

Example:

We brought with us **only** the most important items.

Only the employees were allowed access to the conference room.

73. **ought** Never use **ought** with **have** or **had**. Simply eliminate **have** or **had**.

NONSTANDARD: The photocopy machine **had ought** to work now.

CORRECT: The photocopy machine **ought** to work now.

74. **outside of** Do not use this expression to mean “besides” or “except.”

NONSTANDARD: **Outside of** Terry, there was no other eligible applicant.

CORRECT: **Except** Terry, there was no other eligible applicant.



75. *parameter* This word is correctly used only in mathematical contexts, in which it designates a variable. Do not use *parameter* to mean “boundary,” “limit,” “scope,” “detail,” and so on.

LESS ACCEPTABLE: The team can solve the problem within the **parameters** of the requirements.

PREFERRED: The team can solve the problem within the **scope** of the requirements.

76. *persecute, prosecute* *Persecute* means “to subject to ill treatment.” *Prosecute* means “to bring a lawsuit against.”

Example:

He was not understood by the society at first, so he was **persecuted**.

The former president was **prosecuted** for the anomalies during her administration.

77. *plurals that do not end in -s*. The plural of certain nouns from Greek and Latin are formed as they were in their original languages. Word such as *criteria, media,* and *phenomena* are plural and should not be treated as if they were singular (*criterion, medium, phenomenon*).

INCORRECT: The committee has decided on the judging **criteria**, which **is** to be used for the competition.

CORRECT: The committee has decided on the judging **criteria**, which **are** to be used for the competition.



78. *poorly* **Poorly** is used informally to mean “ill.” Avoid this use in formal situations.

INFORMAL: She missed her class because she was feeling **poorly**.

FORMAL: She missed her class because she was feeling **ill**.

79. *precede, proceed* **Precede** means “to go before.” **Proceed** means “to move or go forward.”

Example:

The board meeting **preceded** the election of officers.

The board **proceeded** with the deliberation.

80. *principal, principle* As an adjective, *principal*, means “most important” or “chief;” as a noun, it means “a person who has controlling authority.” *Principle*, always a noun, means “a fundamental law.”

ADJECTIVE: Our **principal** plan is to make an investment.

NOUN: Mrs. Gallagher is the school **principal**.

NOUN: She follows her guiding **principle** wholeheartedly.

81. *raise, rise* **Raise** usually takes a direct object. **Rise** never takes a direct object.

Example:

Raise your complaints before the board.

Rise to a new day.



82. **real** *Real* means “authentic.” The use of **real** to mean “very” or “really” should be avoided in formal writing.

INFORMAL: This job is one **real** challenge.

FORMAL: This job is **very** challenging.

83. **refer back** This is a common confusion between *refer* and *look back*. This usage is not recommended in formal writing on the premise that the “re-” of “refer” means “back,” so **refer back** is redundant. *Refer back*, however, is acceptable when it means “refer again.” Otherwise, *refer* should be used.

NONSTANDARD: In elucidating on the topic, I would like to **refer back** to the work of Johanssen et al.

CORRECT: In elucidating on the topic, I would like to **refer** to the work of Johanssen et al.

The proposal was **referred back** to the committee which drafted it.

Please **refer** to the notes on the peace conference.

84. **says** *Says* should not be substituted for said.

NONSTANDARD: Then the teacher **says** to us, “Keep quiet!”

CORRECT: Then the teacher **said** to us, “Keep quiet!”

85. *seen* **Seen** is a past participle and can be used as a verb only with a helping verb.

NONSTANDARD: We **seen** this movie a couple of times already.

CORRECT: We **have seen** this movie a couple of times already.

86. *set, sit* **Set** means “to put (something) in a certain place.” Its principal parts—*set, setting, set*, and *set*—are usually followed by a direct object. **Sit** means “to be seated.” Its principal parts—*sit, sitting, sat*, and *sat*—are never followed by a direct object.

Example:

Set the dining area in this corner.

Sit in the chair and get a feel of it before your buy it.

87. *shape* The meaning of *shape* is “spatial form.” In formal writing, avoid using *shape* to mean “condition.”

INFORMAL: My parents are in good **shape**.

FORMAL: My parents are in good **condition**.

88. *slow, slowly* Although *slow* can now be used as either an adjective or an adverb, careful writers use it as an adjective. **Slowly** is preferred as the adverb.

LESS ACCEPTABLE: Walk **slow** because the path is slippery.

PREFERRED: Walk **slowly** because the path is slippery.



89. *so* *So* is a coordinating conjunction. It should be avoided when you mean “so that.”

LESS ACCEPTABLE: Can you please move over **so** the other passengers can sit down?

PREFERRED: Can you please move over **so that** the other passengers can sit down?

90. *take and* This is a nonstandard expression. Eliminate it entirely.

NONSTANDARD: **Take and** put these manuscripts in the filing cabinet.

CORRECT: **Put** these manuscripts in the filing cabinet.

91. *than, then* *Than* is used in comparisons. Do not confuse it with the adverb *then*, which usually refers to time.

Example:

The applicant who came in today is smarter **than** that who came yesterday.

Put the vegetables first, and **then** allow it to simmer for a few minutes.

92. *that, which, who* *That* refers to people or things; *which* refers only to things; *who* refers only to people.

Example:

This is the resort **that (or which)** I have been telling you about.

She is the teacher **who (or that)** received the Employee of the Year award.

93. *their, there, they're* **Their**, a possessive pronoun, always modifies a noun. **There** can be used either as an expletive at the beginning of the sentence or as an adverb. **They're** is a contraction of *they are*.

PRONOUN: **Their** presentation is the best I have seen in years.

EXPLETIVE: **There** must be no complaints, or else the plan will fail.

ADVERB: Jane placed all her things **there**.

CONTRACTION: I fervently hope **they are** all in high spirits.

94. *them, them there, these here, this here, that there* **Them** is always a personal pronoun, never an adjective. When a sentence calls for an adjective, use *these* or *those* in place of either *them* or *them there*. To correct a sentence containing *this here, these here, and that there*, simply leave *here* and *there*.

NONSTANDARD: **Them** essays are written very well.

CORRECT: **These** essays are written very well.

95. *till, until* These words are interchangeable. Be careful, however, of spelling. **Till** should not be spelled *til* or *'til*; **until** always ends in one *l*.

Example:

We played by the seashore **until** we were all tired.

96. *to, too, two* **To**, a preposition, begins a prepositional phrase or an infinitive. **Too**, an adverb, modifies an adjective and other adverbs. **Two** is a number.

PREPOSITION: We went **to** a concert last night.



INFINITIVE: **To** put up one's own business is not an easy task.

ADVERB: She took the advice **too** complacently.

Kathy bought a pink shirt so Ashley bought one **too**.

NUMBER: **Two** kids, **two** pens

97. **unique** *Unique* means "one of a kind. It should not be used to mean "odd," "interesting," or "unusual." The word means "one of a kind," so such expressions as *most unique*, *very unique*, and *extremely unique* are illogical.

ILLOGICAL: The group presented their output in an **extremely unique** way.

CORRECT: The group presented their output in a **unique** way.

98. **ways** *Ways* is plural. Do not use it after the article *a*. Use instead the singular form of *way*.

NONSTANDARD: The chauffeur has **a** considerable **ways** to drive yet.

CORRECT: The chauffeur has **a** considerable **way** to drive yet.

99. **when, where** Do not use **when** or **where** directly after a linking verb. Do not use **where** as a substitute for **that**.

NONSTANDARD: My best memory of Mom was **when** we went by the beach, and we walked hand in hand.

An automat is **where** food is dispensed by machines.



CORRECT: My best memory of Mom **is of going** to the beach and walking hand in hand with her.

An automat is **a cafeteria where** food is dispensed by machines.

100. **-wise** Avoid using this suffix to create new words for a particular situation.

LESS ACCEPTABLE: **Costwise**, this new product we launched is better.

PREFERRED: This new product we launched is **cost-effective**.

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