600+ Confusing English Words Explained

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Introduction

The English language has an enormous vocabulary, and this results in many words that are very similar. Some of them are different by just one letter, like **moral** and **morale.** Others differ in their spelling and pronunciation, like **incite** and **insight.**

There are many pairs of words that appear to mean the same thing – such as **historic** and **historical,** or **definitely** and **definitively** – but actually have different definitions and uses.

It can be very confusing for you as an English learner!

You want to speak correctly and avoid miscommunications, but you're not quite sure about the *exact* meaning and use of each word. Some students even avoid using particular words because of their doubts.

This book aims to clarify more than 600 of the most common confusing words in English. Every entry has various example sentences s that you can see how each word is normally used.

To learn the most from this book, I would suggest trying to write your own example sentences after reading each entry. This will help establish the meaning of the words firmly in your mind, so that you won't forget them.

If you have any questions, please feel free to e-mail me at help@espressoenglish.net – I'm happy to help you further!

Best wishes,

Shayna Oliveira
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a / an / one

Use **one** when the number is important; when you want to emphasize that it is only one (and *not* two or three or more):

- **One** of these eggs is rotten, but the others are OK.
- I wanted to buy three CDs, but I didn't have enough money, so I bought only **one.**

In all other cases, when the fact of being "one" is not important, use **a / an:**

- I had **an** omelet for breakfast.
- I bought **a** new CD yesterday.

What about the difference between **a** and **an?** We use **an** before words beginning with a **vowel *sound,*** and **a** before all other words:

- **an** apple / **a** banana
- **an** ice cream cone / **a** piece of cake
- **an** egg / **a** carrot
- **an** omelet / **a** steak
- **an** umbrella / **a** uniform
  *(because "uniform" is pronounced **yuniform**)*
- **an** hour / **a** hat
  *(we use **an** with **hour** because the H in hour is silent, but the H in hat is not)*

able / capable

The difference between these words is extremely small – but usually we use **able** to describe **current** things someone can do, and **capable** to talk about someone's **future potential.** It is not a strict rule, just a general tendency.

- She's **able** to play a song perfectly after hearing it only once.
  (she can currently do this)
- She's **capable** of becoming a successful musician.
  (she has the possibility of doing this in the future)

- This technology has the **ability** to grow crops in the desert.
  (it can currently do this)
- This technology has the **capability** to end world hunger.
  (it has the possibility of doing this in the future)

The opposite of **able** is **unable,** and the opposite of **capable** is **incapable.**

- The disease made him **unable** to move without pain.
  (he currently cannot move without pain)
- The treatments are **incapable** of curing the disease.
  (there is no possibility of curing the disease with the treatments)

Note that we say **able <u>to,</u>** but **capable <u>of</u>:**

- The martial artist is **able to** break a concrete block with his bare hands.
- Good thing he's very calm – I don't think he's **capable of** violence.

accident / incident

You may hear the words **accident** and **incident** to refer to events in the news. These words are easy to confuse, but they are not exactly the same! **Incident** is more general, and **accident** is more specific.

Incident can refer to any event - big or small, good or bad, intentional or unintentional. A bank robbery, a funny or controversial situation, an argument between celebrities, etc. - all can be described as **incidents.**

An **accident** is a bad event caused by error or by chance. Accidents are always unintentional, and they usually result in some damage or injury. A car crash is one example of an **accident.** If some equipment malfunctions in a factory and injures the workers, that is also an **accident.** Examples of very minor **accidents** are when you step on someone's foot or spill your coffee on someone else. You didn't want or plan to do it.

All accidents can ALSO be described as incidents – but not all incidents are accidents.

If a drunk driver runs his car into a group of people, that is an **accident** (he did not intend to do it; it was caused by alcohol and by chance). It could also be described as an **incident** ("The incident occurred on Main Street at around 2:30 AM").

If some troublemaking teenagers throw rocks at a house and break its windows, that is an **incident** (an event) but not an accident (because they did it on purpose; they intended to do it).

accurate / exact / precise

The word **exact** means that something is perfectly correct.

- an exact replica/copy
- someone's exact words; the exact wording/phrase
- exact measurements
- an exact amount
- the exact date/time/place

The word **accurate** can mean "perfectly correct" as well, but it can also mean "almost correct; correct enough to be useful."

- an accurate number, measurement, calculation
  = a correct number, measurement, calculation
- an accurate description, information, translation, prediction, estimate, memory
  = completely or mostly correct; any tiny differences from the truth are not significant enough to matter

We can use adverbs of degree with the word **accurate:**

- Something can be **extremely/perfectly/totally accurate** – this means it is perfectly correct, it is exact.
- Something can be **reasonably/generally/largely/pretty/fairly accurate** – this means it is not perfectly correct; there are some mistakes, but it is correct in general.

The word precise also means "perfectly correct":

- the precise wording of the contract
  = the same words contained in the contract
- precise measurements = measurements that are correct
- at that precise moment = at *exactly* that moment

It has an additional meaning that is "clearly expressed" or "carefully distinct"

- a **precise** description = a clear and detailed description
- **precise** directions = clear and detailed directions
- Can you be more **precise?** = Can you say it more clearly and specifically?

ache / pain / hurt

An **ache** is discomfort that continues for some time. It is usually associated with a specific part of the body, such as a headache, a stomachache, a toothache, and an earache. After you exercise, the next day your muscles will probably **ache.** An ache is usually not extremely strong, so you can try to ignore it.

Pain is usually stronger, more sudden, and more difficult to ignore. You would feel **pain** when you cut yourself or hit your head on something. If you exercise and you injure yourself – break a bone or tear a muscle – you would feel a sudden **pain.**

We also have the expression **"aches and pains,"** which describes general and various physical discomforts. Your 90-year-old grandfather might complain about all the "aches and pains" he has at his age!

Hurt is a little different because it is usually used as an adjective or verb, not a noun. To describe an ache or a pain, you could say:

- My ankle **hurts.** = I have a pain/ache in my ankle.
- My neck **hurts.** = I have a pain/ache in my neck.
- My shoulders **hurt.** = I have a pain/ache in my shoulders.

Hurt is also used to mean "injure":

- Don't play with that knife – you could **hurt** yourself.
- He was badly **hurt** in the car accident.

Finally, all three of these words can be used to refer to *emotional* pain as well as physical pain:

- My son is in prison; the situation is causing me a lot of **heartache.**
  (heartache = emotional anguish)

- It took her years to move past the **pain** of her divorce.
  (pain = emotional injury)
- I was extremely **hurt** that he didn't invite me to his wedding.
  (hurt = upset, sad)

actual / current / present

Actual is very different from **current** and **present**.

Current and **present** refer to things happening *now* (not in the past or future).
Actual refers to things that are *true* (not things that are false).

- The **current** unemployment rate is 8%.
  = the rate now
- This article claims that unemployment is at 5%, but the **actual** rate is around 8%. *= the correct rate*
- Barack Obama is **currently** the president of the United States.
  = he is the president now
- The language spoken in Brazil is **actually** Portuguese, not Spanish.
  = "actually" is used to make a correction. Portuguese is the true language spoken in Brazil

Now, what about **current** and **present?** These two words are usually the same. Sometimes, **current** is used in the sense of "generally now" and **present** is often used more in the sense of "immediately now, in this place/moment."

- My girlfriend **currently** lives in New York, but she's in Los Angeles **at present.**
  = in general, she is in New York, but at this very moment, she is in Los Angeles.
- The **current** situation is good, but the **present** case is an emergency.
  = in general the situation is good nowadays, but right now we have an emergency

At present always means "now." But there can be some confusion with the word **presently,** which can mean "now" or "very soon."

- He will be here **presently.**
  = He will be here very soon.

- She is **presently** working on a new project.
  = She is working on a new project right now.

You can know which meaning it has by the verbs: if **presently** is used with "will," then it means "very soon in the future." If **presently** is used with "is/are" or other verbs in the present tense, then it means "now."

administrator / boss / manager

A **manager** is somebody who has a level of control and responsibility over other people in a company or organization. For example, in a small clothing store, the salespeople would be responsible for selling clothes and helping customers... and the **manager** would be responsible for making the salespeople's schedule, organizing the store's finances, training new salespeople, and resolving any problems among the employees.

The word **boss** simply refers to the person above you in the company hierarchy. Let's say we have a company with a:

- President
- Vice-president
- Director
- Manager
- Employees

If you are one of the employees, then the manager is your **boss**. If you are the director, then the vice-president is your **boss**.

Your **boss** is the person supervising you, who may be responsible for evaluating your work or giving approval for certain decisions.

An **administrator** is simply a person who does administrative work (working with documents, paperwork, information and data, etc.) An administrator can also be a manager or boss if he or she is the leader of a team of employees... or an administrator can simply be a regular employee.

adverse / averse

The word **adverse** refers to something that is opposing – it goes against what you want, and is often unfavorable, harmful or challenging.

- Heavy rain, high winds, or icy roads are **adverse** weather conditions (because they interfere with the operation of normal life and transportation).
- If a medicine makes the patient's health get worse, not better, it is having an **adverse** effect.
- If a decision has **adverse** consequences, it means that the results are opposite from what you wanted.

Some people pronounce this word **AD – verse,** and others pronounce it **ad – VERSE.**

We often use the noun form, **adversity,** for difficult conditions. Someone who grew up in a very poor family and later became very financially successful has overcome **adversity.**

While the word **adverse** describes a *situation,* the word **averse** describes *people,* and it means the person is not willing to do something:

- If your parents want everything to stay the same, they are **averse** to change.
- Someone who doesn't think it's a good idea to invest money in the stock market is **averse** to risk.

The noun form is **aversion,** and it also refers to a strong dislike or unwillingness to do something. If you have an **aversion** to broccoli, it means you really don't like broccoli and are not likely to eat it.

advice / advise

Advice is a noun, and **advise** is a verb:

- She gave me some good **advice.**
- She **advised** me to get some rest.

There's also a pronunciation difference: **advice** has an "S" sound, and **advise** has a "Z" sound.

Don't make the common error of saying "advices" – the word **advice** is uncountable. However, you can say "pieces of advice":

- The consultant gave me three **pieces of advice** for my business.

affect / effect

Affect is a verb used for the *process* of one thing causing another thing to change. **Effect** is a noun, and it means the *end result* of some change.

- This disease is **affecting** my ability to breathe.
- The medicine had an instant **effect** on the pain.

In spoken English, **affect** and **effect** are pronounced the same.

afraid / scared / frightened

When using these words to describe someone's emotional state – after the verb "to be" and before "of" – you can use **afraid** or **scared** with no change in meaning.

- She's **afraid** of spiders. = She's **scared** of spiders.

"Frightened of" can also be used, but it's not as common.

Image source

However, when used in the active voice, and the SUBJECT of the sentence is the scary thing, you can use *only* **scared** or **frightened**:

- The loud noise **scared** me.
- The loud noise **frightened** me.

You can also use **scary** or **frightening** to describe something that causes fear:

- It was a **scary** experience.
- It was a **frightening** experience.

after / later

Use **after + phrase,** and use **later** alone (at the end of a sentence or phrase).

- I'll call you **later.**
  I'll call you **after I get home** from work.
- First he bought a new car. Two weeks **later**, he bought a new motorcycle.
  He bought a new motorcycle two weeks **after he bought a car.**

You can say **"later + time period"** to refer to an unspecified time in the future, which is still within the period, for example:

- I'll finish the project **later this week.**
- We'll go on vacation **later this year.**

Never end a sentence with "after." Instead, you can use "afterwards"

- "Did you go straight home after the baseball game?"
  ~~"No, we went out for drinks **after.**"~~
  "No, we went out for drinks **afterwards.**"

agenda / itinerary / schedule

An **agenda** is a list or program of things to be done. Workers who are well-organized will often have an **agenda** for meetings – a list of specific topics to discuss, or things to accomplish during the meeting.

If something is **"on the agenda"** or **"on your agenda,"** it means that people are willing to discuss it or work on it.

We also have the expression **"a hidden agenda,"** meaning a secret plan that you are hiding by pretending you have a different intention.

Some people also use the word **agenda** to mean their calendar. If someone asks if you are free for lunch next week, you might say, **"Let me check my agenda"** to find out which day you are available.

The word **itinerary** is a list or plan of things to do during a trip. On an organized tour, the travel agency will give the travelers an **itinerary** describing the different places they will go and things they will see.

A **schedule** is a list of things to be done at *a certain time.* A conference, for example, might have a schedule like this:

- Breakfast 7-9 AM
- Main speaker 9-10:30 AM
- Workshop 11-12
- Lunch 12-2 PM

Public transportation like buses and trains also have schedules. Another word for schedule, when used as a noun, is **"timetable."**

Schedules can also be for long-term projects - the schedule defines what tasks must be done by a certain date. For example, the construction of a building:

- Lay the foundation - by Feb. 1
- Build the structure - by July 1
- Install the electrical systems - by August 1

When referring to longer-term projects, another word for schedule is **timeline.**

If something is done or progressing faster than expected, it is **"ahead of schedule"** - and if something is delayed, it is **"behind schedule."**

Finally, the word **schedule** can be used as a verb for establishing an appointment or action at a certain time, for example: "I **scheduled** my dentist appointment for next Thursday."

ago / back / before

Ago and **back** are used for past times <u>from the present moment:</u>

- I graduated from high school ten years **ago.**
  (ten years in the past from today)
- We sent the package three days **ago.**
  (three days in the past from today)

- I moved here about five years **back.**
  (informal – five years in the past from today)

Before and **earlier** are used for past times <u>from another time in the past.</u> Here are some examples:

- Yesterday I missed my train. I got to the train station at 7:10, but the train had left ten minutes **before.** (or ten minutes **earlier**)
  (= ten minutes before 7:10 yesterday)
- I was very happy when I got this job last January, because I had lost my previous job six months **before.** (or six months **earlier**).
  (= six months before last January)

aid / assist / help

There is no difference in meaning between these three words, but there are some slight differences in the way they fit in the sentence.

Help is the most common and most informal (aid and assist are both more formal).

Aid is more commonly used as a noun, not a verb:

- a **hearing aid** is a small electronic device that helps people with hearing problems to hear better
- **first aid** is the initial medical care given immediately after an accident or injury
- **government aid** is official help from the government
- **humanitarian aid** is helping people who are suffering after a disaster, or suffering from disease, poverty, or war

There is also a word **aide** (pronounced the same way!) which refers to a person whose task is to help - an assistant. A **nurse's aide,** a **teacher's aide,** etc.

Now let's look at the two verbs: **help** and **assist.**

After **help**, we can use a verb with or without "to":

- He **helped me understand** the lesson.
  = He **helped me <u>to</u> understand** the lesson.
- Can you **help us carry** these books?
  = Can you **help us <u>to</u> carry** these books?

In everyday spoken English, it's probably more common *not* to use "to."

After assist, we must use **in + -ING form of the verb** or **with + noun:**

- I'm happy to assist you **in creating** a website.
  I'm happy to assist you **with your website.**
- This program assists people **in finding** a job.
  This program assists people **with their job search.**

The noun form of **help** is also **help**, but the noun form of **assist** is **assistance:**

- Thank you for your **help.**
- Thank you for your **assistance.**
  ~~Thank you for your **assist.**~~
- I'm so grateful for all the **help** I've received from the team.
- I'm so grateful for all the **assistance** I've received from the team.

aim / goal / objective

Many people use these words interchangeably; there is really very little difference between them. In everyday spoken English, the most common word is **goal. Aim** and **objective** are usually used in more formal writing.

One small difference is that an **objective** is more specific than a **goal,** for example:

- Our **goal** is to improve health care for children.
  general
- Our **objective** is to provide 10,000 children with vaccines.
  specific

However, in casual conversation, most people would use **goal** for both general and specific things:

- My **goal** is to lose weight.
- My **goal** is to lose 20 pounds by the summer.

The words **goal** and **objective** are nouns, and the word **aim** can be a noun or a verb:

- The **aim** of this project is to increase our students' motivation.
  aim = noun
- We're **aiming** to increase our students' motivation.
  aim = verb

alien / foreigner / stranger

A **stranger** is a person you don't know:

- When I was a child, my mother taught me not to get into a car with a **stranger.**
- When my car broke down, a kind **stranger** stopped to help me.

A **foreigner** is someone who comes from another country:

- This town is a popular tourist destination, so there are always a lot of **foreigners** around.
- The new law makes it easier for **foreigners** to get documents to work legally.
- A lot of **foreigners** have been moving into this neighborhood – I've met people from seven different countries in my apartment building alone!

The word **alien** is a legal term for **foreigner.** It is usually used to describe **"illegal aliens"** (people who are in the country illegally) or "**resident aliens"** (people who are living in the country legally). Again, this is formal/legal language and in everyday speaking it's best to use foreigner.

Alien also refers to creatures from other planets; it is another word for extraterrestrial.

alive / life / live

The word **l-i-v-e** has two pronunciations:

The verb **live** (with the "i" sound in "sit") means to **reside:**

- I **live** in a small house.
- She **lives** in France.

The adjective **live** (with the "i" sound in "like") has a few different meanings.

When music or a TV broadcast is happening in real time (it was not previously recorded):

- There's **live** music at the bar on Friday nights.
- We're bringing you the latest news **live** from Washington D.C.

When an animal is alive, not dead:

- He found a **live** snake in his tent.

The word **life** is also pronounced with the "i" in "like" and is a noun:

- I'm reading a book about the **life** of Albert Einstein.
- Do you think there's **life** on other planets?
- He has faced many difficulties in his **life.**

The plural of **life** is **lives:**

- My parents are planning to live in Florida for the rest of their **lives.**
- Thousands of **lives** were lost in the war.

The word **alive** is an adjective, and it also means "not dead":

- It's amazing he was still **alive** after being in the desert without water for four days.
- The oldest person **alive** is currently 124 years old.

already / yet

Both **yet** and **already** are used with the present perfect tense.

- **Already** is usually used in **positive sentences.**
- **Yet** is usually used in **questions and negative sentences.**

Imagine that you and your friend are going to travel. There are many things to do, and you ask your friend if he has done these things:

- Have you bought the tickets **yet**?
- Have you arranged a taxi **yet**?
- Have you reserved the hotel room **yet**?
- Have you packed the bags **yet**?

In all the examples, use **yet** at the end of the question. Your friend might answer:

- Yes, I've **already** bought the tickets.
- Yes, I've **already** arranged a taxi.
- No, I haven't reserved the room **yet.**
- No, I haven't packed the bags **yet.**

Use **already** in the positive answers, and **yet** in the negative answers.

There is one time you can use **already** in questions: it's when something happens earlier than expected. If your son finishes his homework in just 15 minutes, you could ask: "Have you **already** finished your homework?!" because you were expecting it to take more time.

all / whole / every

Use **every** with SINGULAR, countable nouns:

- I exercise **every day.**
- **Every student** in the class has a computer.
- **Every necklace** in this store costs more than $1,000.

Use **all** with PLURAL nouns OR with uncountable nouns to mean 100% of many things:

- **All of the students** in the class have computers.
- **All of the necklaces** in this store are expensive.
- **All of this furniture** is new.
  = many pieces of furniture

When talking about time, there is a difference between **every day** and **all day.** If you study **every day,** it means you study on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. If you study **all day,** it means you study from early in the morning until late at night.

Use **whole** (less formal) or **entire** (more formal) with uncountable or singular countable nouns to mean 100% of one thing:

- I ate **the whole pizza.**
  = 100% of one pizza.
- I finished reading **the entire book** in three days.
  =100% of one book.

Here are more examples that show the difference between **all** and **whole/entire:**

- I ate **the entire cupcake.**
  = 100% of one cupcake.
- I ate **all the cupcakes**.
  = 100% of many cupcakes
- **The whole apple** is rotten.
  = 100% of one apple.
- **All the fruit** is rotten.
  = 100% of many apples, bananas, grapes, etc.

Image source: aussiegall

all of / each of

We use **each** to talk about objects individually, and **all** to talk about objects as a group:

- The teacher gave a different task to **each** student.
  ("each" emphasizes the individuality of the members of the group)
- The teacher gave tests to **all** the students.
  ("all" emphasizes the students as a group)

In a similar way, **each of** the members of a group emphasizes them as individuals, and **all of** the members of a group emphasizes them as a whole:

- **Each of** these chairs is hand-crafted.
- **All of** the chairs are made in a factory.
- The doctor spends an hour with **each of** the patients.
- **All of** the patients think he's a great doctor.

With "each," we ALWAYS use the singular form of the verb:

- Each of these chairs ~~are~~ **is** hand-crafted.
  = Each chair **is** hand-crafted.
- Each of the patients ~~were~~ **was** seen by the doctor.
  = Each patient **was** seen by the doctor.

Sentences with "all of" use the **singular** form of the verb if the noun is **singular,** and the **plural** form of the verb if the noun is **plural:**

- All of the beer **is** imported.
  (beer = singular)
- All of the bottles **are** recyclable.
  (bottles = plural)
- All your advice **was** excellent.
  (advice = singular)
- All your suggestions **were** excellent.
  (suggestions = plural)

all ready / already / all right / alright

All ready and **all right** (two words) mean that everything is ready or everything is correct / OK:

- The students are **all ready** for the test.
  = **All** the students are **ready** for the test.
- Your answers are **all right.**
  = **All** your answers are **right.**

Already means that something happened earlier than expected:

- He's only 14 and he's **already** graduated from high school – he's a genius!
- The repairs on my car are finished **already?** Wow, that was fast.
- You don't have to wash the dishes – I've **already** done it.

All right can also mean OK/uninjured, acceptable, or average.

- Are you **all right?**
  = Are you OK? *(after someone falls down and may have injured themselves)*
- If it's **all right** with you, we'll reschedule the meeting.
  = If it's **acceptable** to you
- The food at that restaurant is **all right.**
  = Average; not especially great, but not bad either

Alright is a variant of "all right" that is *not* considered correct, even though many people use it informally.

allow / let / permit

These verbs all have the same meaning. The difference is in their grammatical structure:

LET + PERSON/THING + VERB (base form – without "to")

Examples:

- I don't **let** my kids watch violent movies.

- Mary's father won't **let** her adopt a puppy because he's allergic to dogs.
- Our boss doesn't **let** us eat lunch at our desks; we have to eat in the cafeteria.
- Oops! I wasn't paying attention while cooking, and I **let** the food burn.
- Don't **let** the advertising expenses surpass $1000.

The simple past tense of **let** is also **let;** there is no change!

The verbs **allow** and **permit** are more formal ways to say "let." However, with allow and permit, we use **to + verb:**

- I don't **allow** my kids **to watch** violent movies.
- Our boss doesn't **permit** us **to eat** lunch at our desks.

Permit is the most formal, **let** is the least formal, and **allow** is in the middle.

With **permit** and **allow,** we can also say that something is or is not **permitted/allowed:**

- Smoking **is** not **allowed.**
- Employees **are allowed** to take a one-hour lunch break.
- Passengers **are** not **permitted** to use cell phones during takeoff.
- With a tourist visa, you **are permitted** to stay in the country for 90 days.

allude / elude

If you **allude** to something, it means you refer to it indirectly, without saying it specifically. For example, if there is a software program with lots of bugs and errors, the developer might **allude** to the problems by saying "The process of developing the software has been very challenging." – He does not mention the problems, but he *hints at* them by describing the development as "challenging."

If someone has just received a promotion, they might **allude** to it by saying they're happy about recent events at work. Again, the person didn't specifically say "I'm happy because I got a promotion," they just *referred to it* very indirectly.

The word **elude** means to avoid or escape from something – we often talk about criminals **eluding the police** or **eluding capture.**

We can also use **elude** in a mental sense, when something "escapes" your understanding or cannot be gotten by you:

- I've tried and failed many times; success seems to **elude** me.
- Despite hours of study, the answer to the question continued to **elude** the student.

In fast spoken English, **allude** and **elude** are often pronounced the same.

almost / mostly / nearly

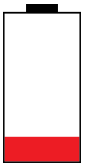
Nearly and **almost** are essentially the same. They mean that somebody or something came close to doing something… but did not do it.

For example, if Jane is running in a race and came in second place, just a couple of seconds behind the winner, then you could say:

- Jane **almost** won the race.
- = Jane **nearly** won the race.

If your computer battery only has 8% power left:

Image source: Cyberpower678



- The battery is **almost** dead.
- The battery is **nearly** dead.

The words **almost** and **nearly** describe *being very close to some limit* (0% power) or *action* (winning the race).

The word **mostly** means generally, usually, or more than half. If it is "mostly cloudy," then it means the sky is more than half covered with clouds. **Mostly** describes a *proportion, the greater part.*

Image source: Benson Kua

If there are 20 people in an English class and 17 are from South America but 3 are from Asia, then "the students are **mostly** from South America."

There is also a difference between **"most of"** and **"almost all."** "Most of" means more than 50%, and "almost all" means close to 100%.

- If 70% of the senators voted to approve a new law, then **most of** them voted in favor of it.
- If 97% of the senators voted to approve a new law, then **almost all** of them voted in favor of it.

alone / lonely / only

Alone means "by yourself" – there is nobody else with you:

- I like to take long walks **alone** so that I have time to think.
- He got up and left the restaurant, leaving me **alone** at the table.

Lonely means "feeling sad and isolated" – it is a negative emotion.

- I was **lonely** on my first day of class because I didn't have any friends.
- She can't stand being single; she says she feels **lonely** without a boyfriend.

Only means "just one" and can be used with people, objects, or actions. After the word **only,** we must have a person, object, or action.

- Dana was the **only student** who understood today's English lesson.
- I have **only one pair** of sunglasses.
- I didn't have a lot of money, so I **only bought this T-shirt.**

also / as well / too

These words are all used to show similarity or sameness:

- Jeff plays soccer. Greg plays soccer, **too.**
- Jeff plays soccer. Greg **also** plays soccer.
- Jeff plays soccer. Greg plays soccer **as well.**

The only difference is in their placement in the sentence. **Too** and **as well** are used at the end of a sentence. (**As well** is more formal than **too**). **Also** usually goes before the verb or adjective.

- **He likes chocolate.**
  I **also** like chocolate.
  ~~I like chocolate also.~~
  I like chocolate, **too.**
  I like chocolate **as well.**
- **The apples are delicious.**
  The pears are **also** delicious.
  ~~The pears are delicious also.~~
  The pears are delicious, **too.**
  The pears are delicious **as well.**

The expression **as well as** can be used in the middle of the sentence, and is similar to "and" or "not only... but also":

- She bought the necklace. She bought the earrings.
- She bought the necklace **and** the earrings.
- She bought the necklace **as well as** the earrings.
- She bought **not only** the necklace, **but also** the earrings.

You can also rephrase this to use **also, too,** or **as well:**

- She bought the necklace. She **also** bought the earrings.
- She bought the necklace. She bought the earrings, **too.**
- She bought the necklace. She bought the earrings **as well.**

As you can see, there are many correct ways to say the same thing!

altar / alter

An **altar** (n.) is an elevated place (like a type of table) where religious ceremonies are performed, or where offerings are left for the gods or spirits:

Image source: Sanbec

The verb **alter** is a more formal word for change.

- Art has the potential to **alter** our perception of the world.
- These vegetables have been genetically **altered** to be richer in vitamins.
- You can re-publish the article in its original form; it may not be **altered.**

The noun form is **alteration:**

- I made a few **alterations** to the project proposal.
  = I made a few **changes** to the project proposal.
- May I suggest one **alteration** to the schedule for the conference?
  = May I suggest one **change** to the schedule for the conference?

Again, this word is a little more formal. In casual spoken English, we can simply use the word "change" as both a noun and a verb.

although / though / even though

These words are all used to show contrast. The difference is where we place them in the sentence. **Although** and **even though** are used at the beginning of a sentence or clause – never at the end:

- **Although** I exercise a lot, I can never seem to lose any weight.
- **Even though** I exercise a lot, I can never seem to lose any weight.
- I exercise a lot. I can never seem to lose any weight, ~~although~~ **though.**
- I can never seem to lose any weight, **although/though/even though** I exercise a lot. *(all three are correct)*

All three can be used in the middle of a sentence, as in the final example.

among / between

It is often taught that "between" is used for 2 items and "among" for 3 or more – but this is not completely accurate. The more accurate difference is this:

- **Between** is used when naming distinct, individual items (can be 2, 3, or more)
- **Among** is used when the items are part of a group, or are not specifically named (in this case, they MUST be 3 or more)

This example will help illustrate the difference:

- The negotiations **between** Brazil, Argentina, and Chile are going well.
- The negotiations **among** the countries of South America are going well.

Of course, these sentences are not equivalent (because there are more countries in South America than just Brazil, Argentina, and Chile) but they illustrate the rule – you CAN use **between** with 3 individual items, and you must use **among** when talking about a general group (in which no specific countries are named).

Here's another example:

- I'm trying to decide **between** the green shirt, the blue shirt, and the black shirt.
- I'm trying to decide **among** these three shirts.

These sentences are the same – but in the first sentence, we specifically name each of the three options (the green shirt, the blue shirt, and the black shirt) – so we use the word **between.** In the second sentence, we treat the items as a group ("these three shirts") so we use the word **among.**

You can find more information and examples here: Grammar Girl: "Between" Versus "Among"

Which is correct: "Between **you and I**" or "Between **you and me**"?

The correct phrase is "between you and me" – never "between you and I" – this is something that even native speakers confuse!

This expression is used when you want the other person to keep some information a secret, for example:

- **Between you and me,** I think John got fired because he's completely incompetent.

This means you don't want the other person to tell anyone else your opinion about John's lack of intelligence/ability.

amoral / immoral

The word **immoral** means something is against established moral principles:

- Many religions consider lying and cheating to be **immoral.**

The word **amoral** means something is completely free from moral considerations - it is neither moral nor immoral.

- Money itself is **amoral** - it is simply a tool that can be used for good or for evil.

amount / number / quantity

Use **amount** with uncountable nouns – things that cannot be separated or counted.

- There's a significant **amount** of traffic in the late afternoon.
- She inherited a large **amount** of money from her grandfather.
- This recipe requires a small **amount** of wine.
- I have a huge **amount** of work to do this week.

Use **number** with countable nouns – words that can be counted and made plural:

- A **number** of my friends are teachers.
- A large **number** of people complained about the restaurant's terrible service.
- This recipe has a small **number** of ingredients.
- I have a huge **number** of tasks to do this week.

The word **quantity** is a more technical/formal word for **number** or **amount**, and it is used for things you can measure (usually objects, not people).

- We have a limited **quantity** of special-edition hats for sale.
  (or: a limited **number** of special-edition hats)
  hats = countable
- They need a large **quantity** of cement for the construction.
  (or: a large **amount** of cement)
  cement = uncountable

ancient / antique

Guillaume Blanchard

The word **ancient** means very, very old - usually hundreds or thousands of years old:

- Archeologists found remnants of an **ancient** civilization that lived in the area around 600 BC.

The word **antique** describes an item that is from an earlier period - usually 50-100 years old:

- I inherited an **antique** table from my grandmother.

Image source: Huhu Uet

angry / upset

If someone is **upset,** it means they are in an agitated mental or emotional state. If somebody is **angry,** it means they are NOT happy, they are hostile. Being angry is stronger than being upset.

If somebody accidentally spilled coffee all over your new clothes, you would probably be **upset** (because it is inconvenient to you), but not angry (because it was an accident and the other person didn't do it intentionally).

If somebody purposefully damaged your car because that person hates you, then you would probably be **angry** at the person because they did a bad thing on purpose.

It's possible to be both **angry** and **upset** at the same time. If a teenage boy took his parents' car without permission and then got into an accident, the parents would probably be both upset (worried about their son's health after the accident) and angry (because their son disobeyed them and broke the rules by taking the car).

Here's another example: if you found out you failed a test, you would be **upset** (but not angry). However, if you found out that the grading of the test was unfair and the teacher only gave high grades to his favorite students, then you would be **angry** (because an injustice was done).

another / other / others

The word **other** is an adjective. It refers to something different.

- The teacher held a textbook in one hand and a pencil in the **other** hand.

The word "other" is often used with "the." It can be used with singular or plural nouns:

- We crossed to the **other** side of the street.
- I liked the lesson, but the **other** students thought it was boring.
  ~~*the others students*~~
- Let's finish this task and leave the **other** tasks for tomorrow.
  ~~*the others tasks*~~

Others is a noun, and we use it when we DON'T say the noun specifically. It can only be used for plural things:

- I liked the lesson, but **the others** thought it was boring.
  = the other students (implied)
- Let's finish this task and leave **the others** for tomorrow.
  = the other tasks (implied)

The word **another** is used when you are talking about one additional thing:

- I ate two slices of pizza and I'm still hungry, so I'm going to eat **another** one.
  (one more slice of pizza)
- The Harrisons just had **another** baby - now they have five children!
  (one more baby)

It can also be used to describe something different, like **a/an + other:**

- I don't understand. Could you give me **another** example?

So what's the difference between "the other" (when use for a singular noun) and "another" (also singular)? "The other" is specific – it is when there are only two options. "Another" is general – it describes one of many options.

- There was a red shirt and a blue shirt. I look terrible in red, so I bought **the other shirt.** *(= the blue one, the only option different from the red shirt).*
- I don't like this red shirt. Do you have it in **another** color?
  (another color = one other color among many possibilities)

answer / reply / respond

These verbs have essentially the same meaning. You can:

- **answer** an email
- **reply** to an email *(most common when talking about e-mail)*
- **respond** to an email

When someone calls you, you **answer** the phone (or **pick up** the phone).

When you make a statement or some comments, we usually say the other person **replies** or **responds**.

When you ask a question, we usually say the other person **answers.** However, this is not 100% - **reply** and **respond** can also be used for answering a question.

When used as a noun (with **a, an, the** and possessive pronouns like **my, your, his, her,** etc.) the words **answer** and **reply** don't change - but the noun form of "respond" is **response.**

- He **answered** my question, but I didn't understand his **answer**.
- We're waiting for a **reply** from the customer.
- Her **response** to his comment was brilliant.

any / some

Some is used in positive statements; **any** is used in negative statements and questions:

- Positive: I want **some** bread
- Negative: I don't want **any** bread.
- Question: Do we have **any** bread in the house?

There is an exception – **some** is used in questions if you are offering something to someone, or asking for something:

- Offering something: Would you like **some** bread?
- Asking for something: Can I have **some** extra ketchup for my fries, please?

Only use **some** and **any** with *uncountable nouns* and *plural countable nouns:*

- She wants **some water.**
  (water = uncountable noun)
- He hasn't received **any e-mails** yet.
  (e-mails = plural countable noun)

Don't use **some** or **any** with *singular countable nouns:*

- ~~Can I have **some** apple?~~ *(apple = singular countable noun)*
  Can I have **an** apple?
- ~~Paul doesn't have **any** car.~~ *(car = singular countable noun)*
  Paul doesn't have **a** car.

apartment / flat / studio

American English speakers say **apartment**, and British English speakers say **flat.**

A **studio** is a specific type of apartment or flat – it is just one room, with no walls or divisions between the bed area, the kitchen area, and the area with a couch or TV.

Image source: Shadiac

Larger apartments with multiple rooms are called a one-bedroom apartment (this means it has one bedroom, one kitchen, and one living room), a two-bedroom apartment (with two bedrooms, one kitchen, and one living room), etc.

The word **studio** is also used for:

- a place where singers/bands record and produce their music
- a place where movies, TV shows, or radio programs are produced
- an artist's or photographer's working space

apologize / sorry

Both of these words express regret for some problem or something you did wrong.

"I'm sorry" is less formal, and **"I apologize"** is more formal. There are a few different ways to continue the sentence. You can say:

- I'm sorry **(that) I yelled** at you.
- I'm sorry **for yelling** at you.
- I apologize **for yelling** at you.

Don't make the common error of saying **"I'm apologize."** It's either "**I'm** sorry" or "**I** apologize."

The noun form for a statement like this is an **apology.** So if your boyfriend forgets your birthday and says he is sorry, you can then accept his apology. Here are more examples:

- The politician **apologized** for his offensive comment, but some people are saying his **apology** was not very sincere.
- The company issued an **apology** to its customers for the defective product.

When you accept somebody's **apology** and agree not to be angry at them anymore, you **forgive** the person.

apology / excuse

If you give an **apology,** you say you are sorry for doing something wrong.

If you give an **excuse,** you provide a reason or explanation for the problem (this can be seen as trying to avoid responsibility).

- **Apology:** "I'm sorry I was late. It won't happen again."
- **Excuse:** "I was late because my car wouldn't start."

- **Apology:** "I'm sorry for the mistake in my report. I should have checked the statistics more carefully."
- **Excuse:** "Well, if you hadn't rushed me to finish the report, I wouldn't have made a mistake!"

appraise / apprise

The verb **appraise** means to evaluate, especially in an official way in which a grade will be given or the value of something determined:

- The teachers will **appraise** the students' presentations.
- A car dealership **appraises** the value of used cars.
- Managers often **appraise** their employees once per year.

The noun form is **appraisal,** meaning an evaluation:

- Please give me your honest **appraisal** of the book I've written.
- We need to conduct a thorough **appraisal** of the property before buying it.

The verb **apprise** means to inform or notify. You can **apprise** (someone) **of** (some news). If your colleague Gina wasn't at an important meeting, you will later need to **apprise** Gina of the decisions that were made at the meeting.

Another common structure is to say that (someone) is, was, or has been **apprised of** (the news):

- The President **has been apprised of** the latest developments in the crisis.
- The students **were apprised of** the increase in tuition.
- Please keep me **apprised of** this situation.
  ~~*keep me appraised*~~

arrive / come / get / reach

Come is a general word used for entering a current place. It can be used for coming from short distances or long distances.

- My sister lives in London, but next week she's **coming** to visit me in Atlanta.
- Our neighbors are **coming** over for dinner tonight.
- **Come** here - I want to show you something.

Arrive and **reach** are usually used for travel. **Reach** usually implies that the distance was long, or there was some difficulty in arriving.

- If we catch the 6 AM train, we'll **arrive** in the city around 7:30.
- We had been driving for eight hours, and we were exhausted by the time we **reached** Miami.

The word **get** is simply an informal way to talk about arriving or reaching a destination:

- If we catch the 6 AM train, we'll **get** to the city around 7:30.
- We had been driving for eight hours, and we were exhausted by the time we **got** to Miami.
- Let's go to the new shopping center tomorrow. Do you know how to **get** there, or do you need directions?
- My brother always takes a nap after he **gets** home from work.

Note that we say **get to** most destinations. But with **here, there,** and **home,** we don't use "to" – we say **get here, get there, get home.**

as far as / as long as / as soon as

Use **as long as** for:

- Time – when talking about a long period:
  "I'll stay with you **as long as** you want."
- A condition that is a requirement:
  "You can go to the party **as long as** you're back by 11 PM."

Use **as soon as** for:

- Time – when one thing happens at the same time as another, or *immediately* after another:
  "The phone rang **as soon as** I walked into my apartment."

Use **as far as** for:

- Degree or distance
  "I'll walk with you **as far as** the corner."
- Opinion (in the expression "as far as I'm concerned"):
  "**As far as** I'm concerned, he owes me an apology."
- To limit your statement (in the expression "as far as I know"):
  "**As far as** I know, Barry has never been outside the country."

assure / ensure / insure

Assure means to tell another person something to remove doubt or anxiety.

- I was afraid we'd miss the flight, but my husband **assured** me we'd get to the airport in time.
- I **assure** you that the water here is perfectly safe to drink.

After **assure,** we always have a person: assure you, assure him/her, etc.

Ensure is something you do to guarantee a specific result.

- We ordered ten pizzas to **ensure** that there would be enough food for everybody.
- Please send the document by express mail to **ensure** that it arrives on time.

Insure (spelled with an "I") is when you get a financial plan to pay for any damage or loss to a person or thing. This is related to the word **insurance,** such as health insurance, car insurance, etc.

- Our house is **insured** against fires, floods, and theft.

automobile / car / vehicle

The word **automobile** is just another name for a **car.** In casual everyday English, we usually use the word **car.**

The word **vehicle** describes the more general category - it means a device for transporting people or things. Cars, trucks, buses, motorcycles, military tanks, sleds, horse-drawn wagons, even bicycles can all be considered vehicles.

All cars are also vehicles – but not all vehicles are cars.

await / wait / hope / expect

To **wait** means to pass the time until something happens:

- It's 6:45. I'm **waiting** for the 7:00 bus.
- We **waited** in line for three hours to get tickets to the concert.
- You need to **wait** for the computer to finish updating.

Await is simply a slightly more formal way to say **wait for.** It is always followed by a noun:

- There are three projects **awaiting** the manager's approval.
- I'm **awaiting** your answer.
- Everyone's eagerly **awaiting** the release of the movie.
  *= Everyone's eagerly **waiting for** the release of the movie.*

To **hope** means you *want* something to happen:

- I **hope** I'll get a promotion this year!
- I'm sorry to hear you're sick. I **hope** you get better soon!
- The traffic is very bad today. I **hope** I won't be late.

To **expect** means to believe that something *probably will* happen:

- We're **expecting** a visit from some clients – they said they'd come at 4:30.
- My boss **expects** me to arrive on time every day.

award / reward / prize

A **reward** is something nice given to a person who has done well. For example:

- If an employee has worked hard, the boss might give her an extra vacation day as a **reward.**
- If a child cleans their room, the parent might buy them a special toy as a **reward.**
- If you lose your cell phone and an honest person finds it and returns it to you, then you might give them $100 as a **reward.**

Reward can be a noun or a verb. As a verb, you can say:

- a person was rewarded for the good thing they did:
  *The **employee was rewarded** for her hard work.*
- someone rewarded someone else with something:
  *The boss **rewarded the employee** with an extra vacation day.*

An **award** is a more formal recognition of a special accomplishment. **Awards** are usually given in public ceremonies in front of an audience (whereas rewards are typically only between the two people involved).

- Olympic athletes who win their competitions are **awarded** gold medals.
- Some companies give an "Employee of the Year **Award**" to the person with the best performance that year.
- The best movies and actors are recognized at the Academy **Awards.**

An **award** refers more to the recognition you receive. Sometimes a certificate, badge, or other small item is given to represent the award – but this simply symbolizes the recognition.

A **prize** is something you receive when you win a contest or game. A prize can be money, a trophy, or an object. When kids play games at an arcade, circus or carnival, they can win **prizes** if they get a certain number of points.

awkward / embarrassing

Something that is **embarrassing** makes you feel uncomfortable in front of other people. Your face turns red and you wish you could disappear!

If you are singing a song in a performance, and you forget the words, that would be **embarrassing.** If you are introduced to somebody, and then later you call them by the wrong name, that would also be **embarrassing.**

The word **awkward** describes a lack of social skills or motor coordination. A person who is physically awkward is always tripping and falling, bumping into things, and dropping things. It is the opposite of being graceful and skillful. An awkward person trying to play soccer might try to kick the ball, but step on the ball instead.

People can also be **socially awkward** – making comments that are a little strange, or not really knowing how to behave in social situations. Sometimes there is an **awkward silence** or an **awkward moment** in a conversation, when nobody really knows what to say.

Awkward moments are a little bit uncomfortable, but they usually do not have the more intense feelings of shame like embarrassment. However, some situations can be both **awkward** and **embarrassing**. For example, if you are on a romantic date and you accidentally make an offensive comment to the other person, that is both awkward (because you lacked social skills) and embarrassing (because you feel ashamed in the situation).

baggage / luggage

These words are the same. Both of them refer to the collection of suitcases/bags you take with you while traveling.

Image source: Kathryn Greenhill

Both of them are uncountable nouns, so don't use "a" or make them plural:

- ~~I have three luggages.~~
  I have three **pieces of luggage.**
- ~~I accidentally left a baggage at the hotel.~~
  I accidentally left **a suitcase/bag** at the hotel.
  I accidentally left **a piece of luggage/baggage** at the hotel.

The place in the airport where you pick up your bags after arriving at your destination is called the **baggage claim.** But when the airline loses your bag, we usually say they **lost your luggage** (not baggage).

The word **baggage** has an additional meaning: emotional or psychological effects from the past that negatively affect your present situation. For example, if you had a past romantic relationship with someone who lied frequently and now you have problems trusting anybody, you have "baggage" from that relationship.

beach / coast / shore

The word **coast** refers to a geographic area – it is the part of the land that is next to the ocean. You can also call it the **coastline.**

*Northeastern **coast** of Brazil*

The word **shore** can be used for the part of the land next to an ocean, sea, lake, or river. For rivers, you can also call the land next to the water a **bank** or **riverbank**.

*The **shore** of a lake*

Coast is usually used from the perspective coming from the *land,* whereas **shore** is usually used from the perspective coming from the *water:*

- We drove for three hours until reaching the **coast.**
  (you drove over the land → area near the water)
- The lighthouse helps boats reach the **shore** safely.
  (the boats go over the water → land)

The word **beach** describes an area next to the water that is covered with sand, where people go to swim, sunbathe, and have fun.

beautiful / pretty

These words describe something that is attractive, nice to look at.

The word **beautiful** is stronger and more complete. You could describe a spectacular sunset as beautiful, or a very attractive woman in a fancy dress as beautiful.

The word **pretty** is more informal and superficial. A nice arrangement of flowers could be described as pretty. You can also describe girls, women, and clothing as pretty – but it is not as strong as beautiful.

The word **cute** is also informal, and means something is attractive in an adorable way. It is often used for children and animals. When describing an adult (man or woman) as **cute,** it means the person is attractive, but not SUPER attractive (for

super attractive we would say the person is **beautiful/gorgeous** - for a woman - **handsome** - for a man - or **hot**, has a sexy connotation, for both women and men).

For boys and men, we don't use pretty or beautiful - we can use **handsome** (usually for men), **hot** (also for men) or **cute** (usually for boys).

become / get / turn

Words like **turn, become, get,** and **go** can describe changes and transformations – but they're each used in different expressions.

Use **turn** for colors:

- Bananas **turn black** if you put them in the refrigerator.
- The sky **turned pink and orange** during the sunset.
- My uncle's hair is **turning white.**

Use **turn into** when talking about a complete transformation:

- The caterpillar **turned into** a butterfly.
- The couch in the living room can **turn into** a bed.
- My dream **turned into** a nightmare.

In informal English, use **get** with emotions:

- I **got angry** when my colleague said things about me that weren't true.
- My son's **getting excited** about his birthday party next week. He'll be 5.
- We always **get really bored** in history class.

You can also use **get** with comparative adjectives:

- It's **gotten more expensive** to buy an apartment in this city.
- I'm **getting better** at playing the piano – I've been practicing a lot.
- It's **getting easier and easier** for me to understand movies in English!

Become can be used with emotions and comparative adjectives in more formal English:

- My sister **became depressed** after she moved to a new city.
- It's **becoming more difficult** to balance work and life in the modern world.

Always use **become** with professions (never "get" or "turn"):

- My son is studying really hard. He wants to **become a lawyer** someday.
- Shirley Temple **became a famous actress** when she was just four years old.

Finally, use **go** with these specific words:

- go crazy
- go blind
- go deaf
- go bald
- go bad (when food or drink becomes bad and you can't eat it)

been / gone

When talking about past travel experiences, we typically use **been** to mean "gone" or "visited," usually with ever/never:

- Have you ever **been** to Australia? (= Have you ever visited Australia?)
- Yes, I've **been** there three times. (= I've gone there three times.)
- No, I've never **been** there. (= I've never visited.)

The word **been** describes trips that have happened at an indefinite time in the past (and implies that the person has returned from the trip):

- I've **been** to Germany twice. *(I am not in Germany now, but I have visited Germany two times at some point in the past).*
- We haven't **been** to India yet. *(We have not yet visited India at any point in the past).*
- Have you ever **been** to Asia? *(Have you visited Asia at any point in the past?)*

When talking about recently going to a place (and the person is *still there*), we use **gone:**

- Sorry, Bob's not in his office. He's already **gone** home for the day.
  = he went home and he is still at home
- Maria's **gone** to the hospital because she's about to have the baby.
  = she went to the hospital and she is still at the hospital
- My sister's **gone** to South America on vacation; she'll be back next month.
  = she went to South America and she is still in South America

We can also use **went** in these cases: Bob already **went** home, Maria **went** to the hospital, my sister **went** to South America. This is especially common in American English.

before / in front of / opposite / across from

The words **opposite** and **across from** mean that something is located at the other side of something.

- The bank is **opposite** the post office.
  = The bank is **across from** the post office.
  = *the bank is on the other side of the street from the post office*
- Henry sat **opposite** me at the table.
  = Henry sat **across from** me at the table.

The expression **in front of** simply means that one thing is closer to a point of reference (the "front" of an area, or the point of view of the person looking).

- I stood **in front of** the bank.
- He sat **in front of** me in the classroom.

The word **before** can be used for location/position, but it is somewhat rare and more formal. Instead, **before** is typically used for *time* or for *position in a sequence*:

- We need to pack our bags **before** leaving for the airport.
  = packing bags must happen first, leaving for airport must happen second
- The letter i comes **before** the letter e in the word "friend."
  = position in a sequence

beg / plead

Both of these words mean to ask strongly, with a lot of deep emotion:

- When John's wife wanted to leave him, he **begged** her to stay.
- When John's wife wanted to leave him, he **pleaded** with her to stay.
- The student **begged** for more time to complete the assignment, and the teacher gave her two more days.
- The student **pleaded** for more time to complete the assignment, and the teacher gave her two more days.

The word **beg** (but not plead) is also used when poor people ask for money on the street: they are begging, and someone who does this frequently is a beggar.

The word **plead** (but not beg) is used in the judicial system, when someone who is accused of a crime pleads innocent or pleads guilty (officially states that they are innocent or guilty).

We have two idioms with beg:

- **"I beg to differ"** is a polite way of saying you disagree with something another person has just said. You have a different opinion.
- **"I beg your pardon"** is a rather formal way of interrupting someone or bringing something to a person's attention. For example, "I beg your pardon - you look familiar, have we met before?"

However, in everyday spoken English it's more common to use "Excuse me" instead of "I beg your pardon."

begin / start

You can use both **start** and **begin** for an activity**.** “Begin” is more formal than “start”:

- I **started** playing the piano when I was 8 years old.
- What time does the meeting **start**?
- He’s **beginning** to read more advanced books in English.
- We left the park when it **began** to rain.

When you **turn on a car or vehicle,** use “start”:

- I had to call a mechanic because my car wouldn’t **start.**

In general, begin is used for **more formal** and **more abstract** ideas:

- Scientists are studying how life **began** on earth.
- World War II **began** in 1939.

belong to / belong with / belong in

Belong to means ownership or possession:

- That's my bike. = That bike **belongs to** me.
- This is Kate's jacket. = This jacket **belongs to** Kate.
- That's our neighbors' dog. = That dog **belongs to** our neighbors.

Belong with means that things/people are similar and should be together. If one person in a romantic relationship says "You belong with me," it is like saying that it is destiny for the two people to be together.

You can also use **belong with** or **belong in** for putting an object into a category with other, similar objects:

- That book about humans traveling to Mars doesn't **belong in** the history section. It **belongs with** the other science fiction books.

An object belongs IN a category, and belongs WITH other similar things.

below / under / beneath / underneath

The word **under** is the most common. It is usually used for three-dimensional objects:

- I found my textbook **under** the bed.
- The cat is lying **under** the table.
- The papers are **under** that magazine.

Under can be used both when the objects are touching (as in the papers and magazine) and when the objects are not touching (as in the cat and table).

You can also use "under" with numbers to mean "less than":

- He ran a marathon in **under** 4 hours.
  = less than 4 hours
- We're looking to buy a house that's **under** $100,000.
  = less than $100,000

The word **below** is often used when describing levels or limits:

- The people who live in the apartment **below** mine are so loud.
- The price of gas dropped **below** $3 a gallon.
- Temperatures will be **below** freezing tonight.

It is also used to describe something on a lower position on a page:

- The map **below** shows the crime rates in the U.S.
- If you enjoyed this post, leave a comment **below.**

Beneath and **underneath** are just more formal words for under:

- The sailors had no idea that there were dangerous rocks **underneath** the surface of the water.
- We sat on the beach and enjoyed a wonderful day **beneath** the clear blue sky.

beside / besides

Beside is a preposition of location – it means "next to" or "on the side of."

- There's a printer **beside** the computer.

However, "beside" is a little bit formal. In casual everyday English, we'd usually say that there's a printer **next to** the computer.

Besides is an adverb that means "in addition to":

- **Besides** being expensive, that car is ugly.

Besides can also be a preposition that means "except for":

- Jenny has no friends **besides** her sister.
  (= Jenny's sister is her only friend)
- **Besides** John, who's a vegetarian, everyone else here eats meat.
  (= John is the only exception to the group of people who eat meat)

big / large

When talking about physical size, we use **big** for most cases. **Large** is a little more formal.

- **Everyday:** Elephants are **big** animals.
- **In a textbook**: Elephants are **large** mammals found in Africa and Asia.

In informal English, we use "large" for size when talking about **clothes** and **drinks:**

- ~~I ordered a **big coffee** with milk.~~
- I ordered a **large coffee** with milk.
- Sizes for shirts, socks, and other clothing items are small, medium, and **large.**

The word **big** is often used in collocations with a *happening or event*, for example:

- a big accomplishment
- a big decision
- a big disappointment
- a big failure
- a big improvement
- a big mistake
- a big surprise

The word **large** is often used in collocations involving *numbers and measurements.*

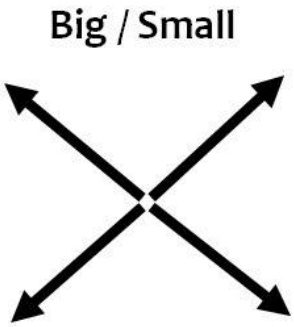
- a large amount
- a large collection
- a large number
- a large population
- a large proportion
- a large quantity
- a large scale

big / small / long / short / tall / huge / tiny

Use **big** and **small** to talk about the general size of something.

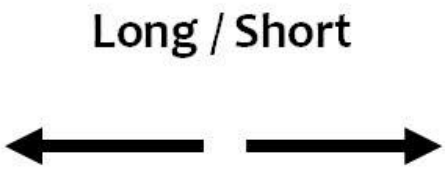
- Elephants are **big.** Mice are **small.**

The word **huge** means "very big," and the word **tiny** means "very small."



- Their new house is **huge!** I think it has 50 rooms.
- "Do you want any cake?"
  "Just a **tiny** piece. I'm on a diet."

Use **long** and **short** to talk about length (horizontal distance). You can also use long and short with time, books, words/sentences, hair, and legs:

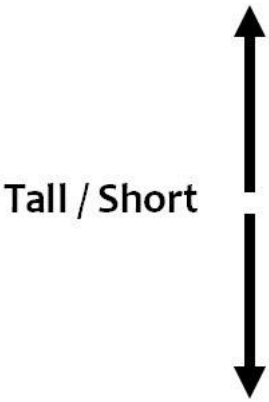


- The line to buy tickets for the concert is very **long.** There are hundreds of people waiting.
- The movie is really **long** - about three hours.
- That book is quite **long** - it has about 500 pages.
- Academic writing often uses very **long** sentences.
- She has **short** blonde hair and gorgeous **long** legs.

There are two ways to talk about distance - **far** or **a long way.**

- The beach is **far** from my house.
- The beach is **a long way** from my house.
- ~~The beach is **long** from my house.~~

Use **tall** and **short** to talk about height (vertical distance) – especially with people, but sometimes also with buildings and trees.



- My brother is really **tall.**
- New York City has a lot of **tall** buildings.
- There are many **tall** trees in the forest.

bill / invoice / receipt

Bill and **invoice** both refer to a document that is requiring money to be paid for goods or services provided.

In everyday conversation, we usually talk about **bills:**

- The electrical company sends you an **electrical bill.**
- The phone company sends you a **phone bill.**
- After you get treated in a hospital, if you don't have health insurance, you'll have a lot of **medical bills** to pay.

When talking about a business or professional relationship, then we usually use the word **invoice:**

- A consultant who gave advice to a company would then send the company an **invoice** (requiring payment for his time).
- When a factory sends products to a store, it will also send the store an **invoice** requiring payment for those products.

Both bills and invoices are sent BEFORE payment. They are requiring the payment to be made. A **receipt,** on the other hand, is sent AFTER payment. It is the confirmation and proof that the payment was made.

- After you buy something in a supermarket, you get a **receipt.**
- After the store pays the factory for the products, the factory will provide a **receipt.**

blanket / comforter / quilt

A **blanket** is a large piece of cloth covering a bed, which helps keep you warm when you sleep.

A **comforter** is a very thick blanket, usually filled with soft and fluffy material inside. It will keep you extra-warm... and comfortable!

Image source: summitsilkbedding.com

A **quilt** is a type of blanket made by sewing different pieces of fabric together, often with a colorful and decorative design. Quilts can be used as blankets for sleeping, or they can be hung on the wall as a type of art.

Image source: Francis.arquesa

borrow / lend / loan / owe

To **lend** or **loan** is to GIVE something to a person temporarily, and to **borrow** is to RECEIVE something temporarily (and you will need to give it back).

If Maria is in class and she doesn't have a pencil, she could ask her friend Daniel:

- "Could I **borrow** a pencil?"
- Or: "Could you **lend/loan me** a pencil?"

Daniel **lends/loans** her the pencil; Maria has **borrowed** a pencil from Daniel. And after she's done using it, she'll give it back.

Lend/loan is often used with **to:**

- Daniel **lent/loaned** his pencil **to** Maria.
- Or: Daniel **lent/loaned** Maria his pencil.

Borrow is often used with **from:**

- Maria **borrowed** a pencil **from** Daniel.

Lend/loan and **borrow** can also be used for money: Imagine you don't have enough money to buy a car, but you get $10,000 from the bank. You have to pay the money back later.

- The bank **lent/loaned** me $10,000.
- I **borrowed** $10,000 from the bank.

The amount of money is also called a **loan** (noun). Many people take out **student loans** to help pay for their education at university.

Now you **owe** the bank $10,000. "Owe" means you have the obligation to return something like money, an object, or a favor.

Avoid this common error! If you want to use your friend's car for the weekend, say:

- "Could **I borrow** your car?" = OK
- "Could **you lend me** your car?" = OK
- ~~"Could **you borrow me** your car?"~~

bother / disturb

To **disturb** means to interfere with something that is at rest or at peace. For example, throwing a stone into a calm lake would **disturb** the surface of the water.

Image source: Jun from Japan

To **bother** specifically means to annoy somebody.

Imagine you are trying to study and your kids keep coming into your room and making noise. In this case, you could use either one: they are **bothering** you (because you are annoyed) or they are **disturbing** you (because they are interfering with your concentration).

Now imagine you are exercising in the park, and there are many insects. The insects are **bothering** you (because you are annoyed) but they are not disturbing you (because you are not at rest; you are moving while you exercise).

Finally, imagine that you learn that your best friend has committed a violent crime. This would **disturb** you (because it interferes with your peace of mind) but you probably wouldn't say it bothers you (because it's not annoying).

bravery / courage

The meanings of these words are essentially the same - they mean facing danger, difficulty, or fear with calm or confidence.

Just make sure not to get confused between their noun and adjective forms:

- A fireman saved a child from the burning house.
  He was very **brave.** / He was very **courageous.**
  ~~He was very courage.~~

With forms of the verb "to be" (is, are, was, were, being, been), use **brave/courageous**. With the word "the" and with possessives (my, your, his, her, our, their) use **bravery/courage**.

- I admire the **bravery** of firemen.
- I admire the **courage** of firemen.
- Their ~~brave~~ **bravery** in the face of danger is inspiring.
- Their **courage** in the face of danger is inspiring.

bring / take

Bring shows movement **TO** the speaker; take shows movement **AWAY FROM** the speaker:

- Could you **bring** me a fork from the kitchen?
  = bring a fork from the kitchen to here
- Could you **take** the mail to the post office?
  = take the mail from here to the post office

bring up / grow up

Children **grow up** – they get older, bigger, and more mature:

- I **grew up** in a small town where everybody knew each other.
- Your kids are 12 and 14 already? Wow - they're **growing up** so fast!

We usually use **grow up** only until kids become adults around age 18. After that, we can say they are **all grown up** (meaning they have finished the growing up process).

Saying that an adult needs to **grow up** means they are acting immature, like a baby or child, and you want them to act more mature.

Parents (or other adults) **bring up** the children. The expression **bring up** can have the connotation of both caring and educating. An alternative word is **raise:**

- My parents **brought me up** to be polite and respectful.
- = My parents **raised me** to be polite and respectful.
- Henry's parents died when he was young, so his grandparents **brought him up.**
- = Henry's parents died when he was young, so his grandparents **raised him.**

Bring up and **raise** are often used in the passive voice:

- **I was brought up** to be polite and respectful.
- **= I was raised** to be polite and respectful.
- Henry's parents died when he was young, so **he was brought up** by his grandparents.
- = Henry's parents died when he was young, so **he was raised** by his grandparents.

Britain / England / the United Kingdom

These words are different because of their geography:

- **England** is a single country. The capital of England is London.
- **Great Britain** is an island that contains three countries: England, Scotland, and Wales.
- The **United Kingdom** is a political unit that includes four countries: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Image source: Peeperman

However, there is some confusion because sometimes Americans say "British" to mean "English" (from England) when in reality the island of Great Britain contains three countries.

broad / wide

Both of these words describe something that is large from side to side:

- A **wide/broad** river

When measuring things, we usually use wide:

- The river is 100 feet **wide.**
- There was a six-inch-**wide** hole in the wall.

We also have these expressions with **broad:**

- **broad shoulders** (when a person's shoulders are far apart from each other)
- **in broad daylight** (in the open light of day, clearly visible)
- talk or describe something **in broad strokes** (in a general way, without giving details)

And we have these expressions with **wide:**

- **wide open** (with a large opening or vulnerability)
- **eyes went wide** (your eyes became very open)
- **a wide range of things** (a large and varied number)
- **wide of the mark** (when an estimate or guess is not accurate)
- **far and wide** (across a large area)
- **wide awake** (completely awake and thinking clearly; not sleepy/tired at all)

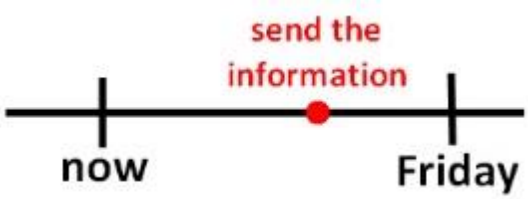
by / until

When talking about a date in the future…

Use **by** if a *single event* will happen before that point:

- I will send you the information **by** Friday. *(= before Friday)*

- Our guests will arrive **by** 6:00. *(= before 6:00)*



Use **until** if a *continuous event* will continue and then stop at that point:

- I'll be working on the project **until** Friday.
  (= continuously until Friday; I will stop working on Friday)
- Our guests will stay **until** 9:00.
  (= continuously until 9:00; they will leave at 9:00)

can / could / able to

"Can" and "able to" are the same in the present tense:

- **Can** you take on this project?
  Yes, I **can** take on this project.
- **Are you able to** take on this project?
  Yes, I**'m able to** take on this project.

The negative forms are **can't** and **not able to** – or **unable to:**

- Sorry, I **can't** take on this project.
- Unfortunately, I'm **not able to** take on this project
- Unfortunately, I'm **unable to** take on this project.

Can/can't are more informal and more common in everyday speaking. **Able to** and **not able to / unable to** are a little more formal.

In the past, we use **could/couldn't** or **was/wasn't able to** (or **was unable to**):

In general, both are used in the negative form:

- I **wasn't able to** finish all my homework yesterday.
- I **was unable to** finish all my homework yesterday.
- I **couldn't** finish all my homework yesterday.

But in the positive form, "was able to" is a little more common than "could":

- I **was able to** leave work a little early yesterday.

In the future, there is only **will/won't be able to.** Don't say **"will can"** or **"won't can"** - it's a common error in English!

- I have some free time tomorrow, so I**'ll be able to** work on this project.
- Sorry, I **won't be able to** go fishing tomorrow. I have another commitment.

When you are making a polite request for someone to do something, use "could" (more formal) or "can" (more informal):

- **Could** you please bring me a glass of water?
- **Can** you please bring me a glass of water?

When asking about someone's abilities, you can use either CAN or ABLE TO:

- **Can** you read Japanese?
- **Are you able to** read Japanese?

Can is probably more common in spoken English, simply because it's shorter.

capital / capitol

The word **capitol** is very specific - it refers to a building or complex of buildings where the government meets to make laws.

*The **capitol** building in the U.S.*
Image source: Mariya Gencheva

The word **capital,** in politics/geography, refers to the town or city that is the official center of a country's government:

- Washington D.C. is the **capital** of the U.S.
- London is the **capital** of England.

In economics, the word **capital** refers to wealth (money and/or property) belonging to a person or company. A business that is just beginning needs **start-up capital** (an amount of money to get started).

We also have **capital letters** (ABC) – the big letters that are different from lowercase letters (abc).

Capital and **capitol** are pronounced the same.

carpet / mat / rug

These three words all refer to floor coverings – but they are of different sizes.

A **carpet** usually covers the *entire* floor, from wall to wall:

A **rug** covers a medium-sized area:

Image source: Bomshanhochun

A **mat** covers a very small area – like a **doormat** or a **yoga mat:**

Image source: Meninos.us

ceiling / roof

The upper interior surface of a room is called the ceiling. The upper exterior surface of a building is called the roof.

A tall apartment building has many ceilings inside it, because each level has its own ceiling - but it only has one roof, at the very top.

chance / possibility / opportunity

With the verb **have,** always use **opportunity.** The word **possibility** is more often used with **"there is":**

- There's a **possibility** I might move to England next year.
- I have the **opportunity** to work in my company's London office.

Also, **possibility** is neutral – it means maybe the event will happen, and maybe it will not happen. The word **opportunity** is a little more positive, it expresses the possibility for something good. So we can use **possibility** with good or bad things, but **opportunity** is usually used only for good things:

- I'm worried about the **possibility** of losing my job.
- I have the **opportunity** to do a study abroad program.
- You should take that job. It's a great **opportunity** for your career.

The word **chance** is more informal, and it can be used for possibilities or opportunities!

- This project has so many problems, there's little **chance** of success.
  = little possibility of succeeding
- Is there any **chance** of rain this weekend?
  = any possibility that it will rain
- The boy got a **chance** to meet his favorite professional basketball player.
  = got the opportunity to meet his favorite player
- I was chosen to appear on the TV show! This is my **chance** to become famous!
  = my opportunity to become famous

change / switch

The word **change** means for something to become different. The word **switch** is more specific – it means to stop using/doing one thing and start using/doing another.

- I'm going to **change** a few things in my life this year.

- Could you **switch** seats with me, so I can sit next to my husband?
  (the two people will exchange seats)
- Her personality has **changed** a lot recently.
- I wasn't happy with my Nokia cell phone, so I **switched** to a Samsung.
  (I stopped using the Nokia and started using the Samsung)

chauffeur / driver

The word **driver** is more general – anybody who drives a vehicle is a driver. You are a driver when you are driving your car. Some people work as **bus drivers** and **taxi drivers** (the drivers of trains are usually called conductors).

A **chauffeur** is a person who is employed to drive a car for a private individual. Rich people and celebrities often have chauffeurs so that they do not have to take public transportation, or drive themselves.

All chauffeurs are also drivers; not all drivers are chauffeurs.

Image source: James Rosie

city / downtown / town

A **city** is larger than a town. New York City, Boston, Miami, and Los Angeles are examples of cities. All state or country capitals are cities; cities usually have some significant political, economic or cultural importance. The word **town** refers to a smaller population center. And a very small population center – even smaller than a town – is called a **village.**

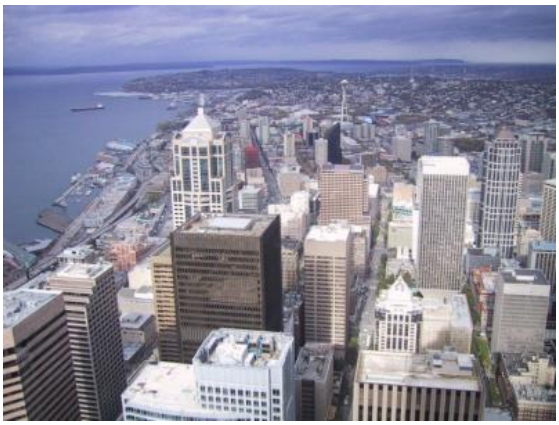


Image source: Lumattias

To complicate things, the central part of a city (especially the main commercial or business area) is called **downtown**. If you live downtown, you live right in the middle of the main action of the city - and it's more expensive to live downtown than to live in one of the other neighborhoods.

classic / classical

The word **classical** can describe something that is:

- Influenced by ancient Greek or Roman culture (classical mythology, classical architecture)
- Related to European traditional music from the 18th-19th centuries (classical music)
- Related to the established fundamentals of a field of art or study (classical ballet, classical mechanics) – NOT new or experimental

The word **classic** is more general – it means something excellent that has been well known and highly regarded for many years.

- The Beatles are an example of **classic** rock music from the 1960s.
- Somebody who loves cars might want to buy a **classic** automobile from the 1970s.
- A **classic** textbook on a particular subject is one that is very good and many people have used it for a long time.
- **Classic** movies are ones that stay famous over many years because they are considered great.

clever / intelligent / smart

Intelligent and **smart** are the same. Smart is more informal. In an official report or scientific article, we would probably use "intelligent," and in everyday speaking, we would probably use "smart."

- The stereotype that blondes are less **intelligent** is unsupported by scientific evidence.
- Your daughter is 3 years old and she already knows how to read? She's so **smart!**

The word **clever** has the connotation of being smart in a creative way. If somebody is able to find an unusual and innovative solution to a problem, which nobody else imagined, we would describe the person as clever. A clever person can be good or bad:

- A person who creates an interesting new method of reusing recycled material is **clever.**
- A thief who invents a creative way to break into a bank and rob it is also **clever.**

close to / near / next to

If two things are **next to** each other, it means they are *immediately* beside each other:

Ex) There's a bank **next to** my house.

With the word "next," we always use "to":

Don't say "There's a bank **next** my house."

If two things are **near** or **close to** each other, it means they are *in the same local area* (but not immediately beside each other):

Ex) There's a bank **near** my house. = There's a bank **close to** my house.
Don't say "near to."

close / shut

You can use both close and shut with **doors** and **windows:**

- Please **close/shut** the door.
- I **closed/shut** the window because it was getting cold.
  (the past tense of "shut" is also "shut")

With **eyes** and **mouths,** "close" is probably a little more common than "shut" (especially with mouth):

- He **closed** his eyes and tried to sleep.
- The dentist asked me to **close** my mouth.

"Shut your mouth!" is a very rude way to tell somebody to stop talking.

When talking about a **store, bank, post office, etc.,** use only close:

- The bank **closes** at 4 PM.
- What time does the post office **close**?
- Attention shoppers: the store will be **closing** in 15 minutes.

cloth / clothes / clothing

Clothes and **clothing** refer to the things you wear – shirts, pants, underwear, dresses, suits, etc.

Cloth is the material, the fabric. Cotton, wool, silk, etc. are different types of cloth.

Image source: Tony Hisgett from Birmingham, UK

There is also a pronunciation difference:

- The **o** in **clothes/clothing** sounds like the **o** in **"no."**
- The **o** in **cloth** sounds like the **aw** in **"saw."**

Now, what about **clothes** and **clothing?** They are mostly the same, and sometimes used interchangeably, but there is a tiny difference:

- **Clothing** is more formal, and usually refers to a general category: men's clothing, women's clothing, athletic clothing, clothing made from natural materials, etc.
- **Clothes** refers to the individual items that you wear. You pack your **clothes** in your suitcase before going on a trip, and you take off your **clothes** before taking a shower.

collect / gather

The word **gather** simply means to bring together or come together:

- I **gathered** all my books and put them into my backpack.
- A crowd **gathered** around the TV to watch the World Cup game.

If something is getting faster or stronger, you can say it **gathers momentum** or **gathers strength**:

- The charity campaign **gathered momentum** as it spread on social media.
  = it spread faster and faster

To **collect** means you accumulate things and keep them as a hobby:

- I **collect** coins from different countries.

The word **collect** is also used for getting and keeping things in general:

- The government is **collecting** data from its citizens' phone calls.
- The bank is using a questionnaire to **collect** information from its customers.
- We're **collecting** donations for the animal shelter.

The word **gather** emphasizes the *distant starting point of the things*. If your child spreads his toys all around the house, you would gather the toys (from the various places) and put them away in the closet. You could also gather flowers from a field; the flowers are separated from each other in the field.

The word **collect** emphasizes the *close ending point of the things* - you are keeping them close to each other, in order to use them in the future.

come back / go back / get back

Typically you say **"go back"** when talking about a place that is NOT your current location, and you say **"come back**" when you ARE located at the place/destination.

An example will make it clearer:

I am from the United States, and I am currently living in Brazil. If I plan to move back to the U.S., then I would say "I'm **going back** to the U.S. next month." I say "going back" because I am currently NOT in the U.S.

But my parents, who are in the U.S., would say "Our daughter is **coming back** to the U.S. next month." They say "coming back" because they ARE currently in the U.S.

You **go back** to a place where you have traveled to before (but you don't live there). I've been to Germany before - and I'm **going back** to Germany for another visit next year.

You **get back** to a place where you typically stay / live. My husband and I just took a 3-day trip to another state, and we **got back** to our city this afternoon.

Here's another example - let's say I went to the store and bought some milk, but forgot to buy eggs. This means I need to go to the store again. I'd say "I'm **going back** to the store - I'll **get back** (home) in about 15 minutes."

compliment / complement

These two words are pronounced the same, but they are spelled differently and have different meanings.

Compliment can be both a noun and a verb. A **compliment** is a positive comment about someone or something, for example: "You have beautiful eyes!"

And the verb **compliment** (or the expression "pay someone a compliment") means to make a positive comment:

- He **complimented me** on my web design skills.
- He **paid me a compliment** on my web design skills.

The adjective **complimentary** means "free":

- At this hotel, breakfast is **complimentary.**
- You get a **complimentary** cookie when you order coffee at that café.

Complement can also be a noun or a verb. If two things complement each other, it means they go well together; they make each other appear better.

- That necklace is the perfect **complement** to your outfit.
- My business partner and I really **complement** each other. We make a good team.

The adjective **complementary** means that two things are different, but go together well – you could say, "My business partner and I have **complementary** skills."

concern / concerned / concerning

If you say **someone is concerned,** it means that person is worried:

- **I'm concerned** about my son – he's not getting good grades in school.
- I live in a big city, and **my mother is concerned** for my safety.
- **We're concerned** that we won't be able to finish the project in time.

You can also say "it concerns me" to talk about something that worries you:

- I've had a stomachache for the past three days**. It's starting to concern me.**
- **It concerns me** that the teachers don't seem interested in helping the students.

The noun **concern** means "a worry":

- Sheila is going to marry an ex-convict. Her father has deep **concerns** about the relationship.
- There is growing **concern** that the country's economy may enter into a recession.
- I have a few **concerns** about this contract – it doesn't seem like a good deal.

The word **concerning** means something completely different – it means "relating to" or "about."

- Please visit your local bank for more information **concerning** your account.

"Concerning" is a bit formal – in everyday English we typically use "about":

- **Formal:** There were a number of questions **concerning** the new program.
- **Informal:** There were a number of questions **about** the new program.

When **concerned** is used as a past participle (*after* the subject), it means "involved" or "affected":

- There was a big fight at the bar. The police talked with everyone **concerned.** *(Everyone involved in the incident)*
- After a defect was discovered in the manufacturing process, the products **concerned** were recalled. *(The products affected by the defective process)*

confident / confidant / confidence

The adjective **confident** describes when you feel certain – especially of a good outcome, like success. It can also describe a person who feels good about himself/herself.

- I'm **confident** that all the problems will be resolved soon.
- The company is **confident** of a successful winter season.
- I'm attracted to women who are strong and **confident.**

A **confidant** or **confidante** is a person who can be trusted; a person to whom you often tell secrets or discuss personal issues.

- The actress prefers to keep her love life private; she only discusses personal matters with her **confidants.**
- Brian was a **confidant** of Governor Williams – they grew up on the same street and remained close friends into adulthood.

When you tell a secret or private information to somebody, you are **confiding in** that person – telling the person things because you trust him/her to keep them secret.

Some confusion comes from the word **confidence,** which can be used in two ways:

1) As a noun for the quality of feeling good and strong about yourself:
   *Taking martial arts classes really helped boost my **confidence!***
   *His **confidence** grew as he practiced more.*
2) Trust or faith in a person or thing:
   *- If someone tells you something **in confidence** or **in strict confidence,** it means they are trusting you to keep it a secret.*
   *- If you **place/put confidence** in someone, it means you trust them.*
   *- If someone **betrays/breaks** your **confidence,** it means they did something that destroyed the trust you had in them.*

continually / continuously

Continuously means something happens without stopping, without interruption:

- A waterfall has water **continuously** falling over the edge of a cliff.
- Your heartbeat and breathing are **continuous.**

Continually means something happens frequently/repeatedly.

- A wife might **continually** remind her forgetful husband to take out the trash - meaning she reminds him multiple times.
- If you have an old car, it might **continually** break down - it breaks down very frequently.

convince / persuade

These words both refer to when a person influences another person to do or believe something:

- He **persuaded** me to move to New York by telling me about how exciting the city was.
- He **convinced** me that New York City was an exciting place to live.

However, there are a few differences. We **persuade someone TO do something.** Persuade is used for influencing someone to take action. We **convince someone THAT something is true.** Convince is used for facts or beliefs:

- My mother didn't want to go to the doctor, but I **persuaded** her to make an appointment.
  persuade --> action of making an appointment
- My mother didn't want to go to the doctor, but I **convinced** her that it was a good idea.
  convince --> fact that seeing the doctor would be a good idea

You can also use the adjective **convinced** to describe it when a person is completely sure of their belief in something:

- I'm **convinced** that war is always wrong.

Somebody can persuade you to do something… even though you're not convinced it's the best thing to do!

- My friend **persuaded** me to become a vegetarian, but I'm not **convinced** I'm getting enough protein in my diet.

An argument that is very strong and effective in making you believe something is a convincing argument:

- The lawyer presented a **convincing** argument that his client was innocent.

A person who is very good at influencing you to do things is **persuasive:**

- My father managed to get the local law changed in the town. He can be very **persuasive.**

Finally, the noun persuasion refers to the act of influencing or encouraging somebody to do something:

- After a lot of **persuasion** from family members, my grandmother finally moved into a retirement home.

could / should / would

Use **should** and **shouldn't** to ask for and give advice and suggestions:

> "I've had a really bad headache for the past week."
> "That's not good – you **should** go to the doctor."
>
> "I want to make more friends, but I don't know how."
> "First of all, you **shouldn't** spend so much time on the computer. You **should** go out and join a club or start playing a sport instead!"
>
> "I had a fight with my best friend. What **should** I do?"
> "Hmm… I think you **should** call her and tell her you're sorry."

Use **could** and **couldn't** for ability in the past (they are the past forms of **can** and **can't**):

- When I was younger, I **could** run a mile in 7 minutes. Now it takes me 20 minutes!
- Yesterday, I **couldn't** find my wallet anywhere – but this morning I found it.
- Last year, he **couldn't** speak English very well, but now he **can.**

Use **could** to talk about future possibilities:

> "Do you have any ideas for our publicity campaign?"
>
> "Yes, I've got a few ideas. I **could** put advertisements on Facebook and Google. We **could** also give out pamphlets in our neighborhood. Maybe John **could** even contact local TV stations."

Use **could** to make polite requests:

- **Could** you please open the window? It's hot in here.
- **Could** you turn the music down? Thanks.
- **Could** you make 10 copies of this report, please?

Use **would** to talk about unreal or unlikely situations:

- If I were the president of my company, I **would** make a lot of changes.
- If people were more generous, there **wouldn't** be so much poverty in the world.
- She **would** travel around the world if she had more vacation time.

In this case, **would** is often shortened to **'d**

- If I were the president of my company, **I'd** make a lot of changes.

Use **Would you like…?** to make polite offers:

> "**Would you like** anything to drink?"
> "A soda would be great. Thanks!"

"**Would you like** to join us for dinner?"
"I'd love to, but I actually have other plans tonight."

"**Would you like** to see some pictures from my vacation?"
"Sure!"

Don't use **"to"** after **should, could,** or **would:**

~~You shouldn't to smoke.~~
You shouldn't smoke.

~~We could to order pizza tonight.~~
We could order pizza tonight.

~~I would to buy a new car if I had the money.~~
I would buy a new car if I had the money.

council / counsel

The noun **council** refers to a group of people that discusses or decides about a particular subject, or that represents people, or runs an organization. It is like a committee.

- The **city council** voted to invest more funds in education.
- The **security council** is debating the use of armed guards at shopping centers.

The noun **counsel** means "advice" (especially from a knowledgeable person) and the verb **counsel** means to give this advice:

- You need some professional **counsel;** you should call a lawyer.
- My parents **counseled** me to save money and not spend it all.

critic / critical / criticism / critique

Let's start with the difference between **criticism** and a **critique.**

Criticism is negative comments - identifying faults or bad points. A **critique** is simply an evaluation - it can comment on the good points and/or the bad points.

- My project idea received a lot of **criticism** from my colleagues - they said it would never work.
- In his **critique** of the book, Johnson praises the excellent character development, but says the plot moves too slowly.

A **critic** is a person. There are two types of people who are critics:

- A professional critic is someone who specializes in evaluating art, films, or literature: an **art critic,** a **movie critic**, etc. This type of critic makes critiques - reviews a work of art to evaluate its good and bad points.
- A critic in general is someone who tends to find negative things and point out faults. This type of critic likes to criticize (meaning to make criticism - negative comments). The president's **critics** say he is not devoting enough funds to national security.

The word **critical** also has two meanings. When describing a person, it means the person is finding fault:

- My mother was always very **critical** of my work - she said I would never be a good writer.

When describing a thing or situation, **critical** means "essential" or "extremely important":

- The baseball player made a mistake during a **critical** moment in the game, causing his team to lose.
- Access to clean water is **critical** to the health of the population.

cure / treat / heal / recover

The verb **treat** is used for giving medical aid; making efforts to help a sick or injured person get better:

- The doctor **treated** the girl with antibiotics.

Heal is typically used for injuries and wounds (not diseases), when the injury gets better naturally by the body's own processes:

- It was just a minor cut, it **healed** in a day or two.
- People wear casts to keep the broken bones in the right position while they **heal.**

Cure is typically used for diseases - meaning when medicine completely eliminates the disease and restores the person to health. It can be both a noun and a verb:

- Antibiotics can **cure** minor infections.
- The doctors said her cancer was **cured** after many weeks of chemotherapy.
- Scientists have not yet found a **cure** for AIDS.

The verb **recover** describes the process of a person resting and getting back to full health after a disease, injury, or surgery:

- It took him a month to **recover** from the injuries he suffered in the car crash.
- I have a really bad cold and I'm staying home from work today to **recover.**
- She spent a week in the hospital **recovering** from her kidney transplant.

custom / habit

The word **habit** is typically used for personal actions - things that you do frequently and repeatedly without even thinking about them:

- I have the **habit** of falling asleep in front of the TV.
- My brother has the bad **habit** of biting his nails.
- Diana is trying to develop healthy eating **habits.**
- I don't trust him. He's a **habitual** liar.
  (the adjective form is "habitual")

The word **custom** is used more for cultural or religious traditions.

- People in this country have the **custom** of removing their shoes before entering the house.
- According to religious **custom,** wearing white symbolizes purity.
- It's **customary** to give people gifts on their birthdays.
  (the adjective form is "customary")

The word **custom** also has another meaning - as an adjective, it is the short form of **customized** - meaning something is changed to make it more personal, individual, or unique:

- I got a **custom** cell phone case with a picture of my dog on it.

deadly / fatal / lethal

All of these words mean "capable of causing death."

Usually the word **fatal** means that somebody *actually died:*

- He survived his first two heart attacks, but the third one was **fatal.**

We often describe the following things as **fatal** if they cause someone to die:

- accident, crash, fall, stabbing, shooting, attack, blow, injury, wound

The word **fatal** can also describe a mistake that caused something to fail. For example, a fatal error in a scientific theory would mean that theory isn't valid.

The word **lethal** is often used to describe *weapons or situations* that can cause death:

- He was convicted of assault with a **lethal weapon.**
- She died after taking a **lethal mixture** of drugs (or a **lethal dose** of sleeping pills).
- Criminals punished with the death penalty are executed with a **lethal injection.**

The word **deadly** is like lethal – it can mean somebody died, or it can mean something was capable of causing death, even if nobody actually died. It can be used for accidents, diseases or dangerous animals.

decent / descent / dissent

The adjective **decent** (DEE – sint) describes something good, satisfactory, or civilized:

- My job's not very glamorous, but I earn a **decent** salary.

- He might seem a bit cold, but he's a **decent** guy once you get to know him.
- I'm selling a used laptop in **decent** condition.

The noun **descent** (di – SENT) has a few different meanings:

- The action of going down:
  *After reaching the top of the mountain, the hikers began their **descent.***
- A downward slope:
  *The last two miles of the trail are a gradual **descent** into the valley.*
- Describing family origin:
  *He is of Japanese **descent.***

The word **dissent** (di – SENT) can be a noun or a verb, and it means a difference of opinion; to disagree:

- The pastor's controversial sermon sparked **dissent** among members of the congregation.
- After the government's decision to raise taxes, large groups of protestors expressed their **dissent.**

delay / late / postpone

Late is an adjective and an adverb, describing an event that happened after the correct time:

- We had a **late** breakfast at 10:00.
  (the usual time for breakfast is earlier, around 7-9 AM)
- The bus arrived thirty minutes **late.**
  (the bus arrived thirty minutes after the correct time on the schedule)

Avoid this common error: if you arrive late for an appointment, don't say "Sorry for late" or "Sorry for the late." The correct expression is **"Sorry I'm late."**

Delay is a noun and a verb, describing a *cause* for something to be late:

- We were **delayed** by heavy traffic.
  (the traffic caused us to be late)

- The **delay** in the project was caused by a miscommunication.
  (the miscommunication caused the project to fall behind schedule)

Postpone is a verb – it is when you *choose* to do something at a later time than planned. Usually "delay" involves factors beyond your control (like the traffic or weather), whereas "postpone" is a more conscious decision to change the schedule.

- Three team members aren't available on Tuesday – let's **postpone** the meeting until Thursday.
- My daughter got sick, so we **postponed** our camping trip until the following weekend.

decline / deny / refuse / reject

To **deny** something is to say something is not true, or say that you *DID* NOT do something:

- The teenager **denied** stealing the DVDs from the store.
- The businessman **denied** the accusations that he had stolen money from the company. *(He said he didn't do it)*

To **refuse** is NOT to do something, or to say firmly that you *WILL* NOT do something:

- My 5-year-old son is **refusing** to go to bed because he wants to keep playing with his toys.
- The employee was fired after he **refused** to do what the manager asked.

Note that after **deny** we use the -ing form or a noun, and after **refuse** we use the "to" form of the verb.

To **reject** something is to not accept it – often because it's not good enough, or because you don't believe in it.

- She was **rejected** from the state university because her grades were terrible.
- Gary is an atheist. He **rejects** the idea of god.

- He asked her out to dinner, but she **rejected** him.

To **decline** is to say "no" *politely* to a proposal, invitation, or suggestion

- Thank you for your invitation to the banquet, but I'm afraid I'll have to **decline.**
- The president **declined** to comment on the political scandal.

defect / fault / flaw

A **flaw** is a problem or error (small or large) that makes something less effective or valuable. The word **flaw** can be used for problems in objects, ideas, or people's character:

- **Objects:** This diamond is less expensive because it contains several **flaws.**
- **Ideas:** There's a major **flaw** in your plan – it will never work.
- **People:** He's the perfect boyfriend; his only **flaw** is the fact that he sometimes speaks without thinking.

The word **defect** also refers to a problem, usually when a mechanical or manufactured item was produced with the problem. We often use the adjective **defective.**

- **Defects** in the machinery caused several fires to break out in the factory.
- This camera is **defective** – the flash doesn't work. I'll need to exchange it.

When a baby is born having something wrong or not normal with its body, this is called a **birth defect.**

The word **fault** refers to *responsibility* for a problem or mistake. It's usually used with "my/your/his/her fault" or to say that a person/company is "at fault" for the problem.

- The car accident was his **fault** because he drove through a red light.
- The giant factory is **at fault** for the air pollution in this area.

You can also use the word **faults** to talk about problems with people's character in general, as in the expression, "Everyone has their faults."

definitely / definitively

Definite (adjective) or **definitely** (adverb) means certain, without a single doubt:

- We have **definite** plans to move to New York.
  (it is 100% certain that we will move there)
- I'm **definitely** going to the party.
  (it is 100% certain that I am going)
- This $50 jacket is **definitely** overpriced. I saw the exact same jacket for $30 in another store.
  (it is completely certain that $50 is too much)

The word **definitively** (adverb) or **definitive** (adjective) means that something *decides* an issue, or provides a clear and firm answer/solution to a particular matter:

- The evidence from the DNA test **definitively** proved that Ryan was not the murderer.
- The company had been in financial trouble for years, but its **definitive** end came when it declared bankruptcy in March.

despite / in spite of

These expressions are the same - just remember not to say "despite of"!

- We won the game **despite having** two fewer players.
- We won the game **in spite of having** two fewer players.

After **despite** and **in spite of,** we use a **noun** or a **gerund** (-ING form of the verb). Do *not* use the verb base form or a subject + verb:

- I arrived on time **despite leaving** late.
- ~~I arrived on time **despite leave** late.~~
- ~~I arrived on time **despite I left** late.~~

We can say "in spite of the fact that" or "despite the fact that" if we want to follow the statement with a subject + verb:

- I arrived on time **despite the fact that** I had left late.
  = despite leaving late.
- He was hired **in spite of the fact that** he was not qualified.
  = despite not being qualified.

die / died / dead

Die is the verb in the present, and **died** is the verb in the past:

- He's very sick; the doctors say he's going to **die.**
- The nurse comforted the **dying** soldier.
- One of the country's most famous authors **died** last week.

Dead is the *adjective,* so we often use it with the verb "to be," or before a noun:

- He died in 1972. He **has been dead** for over 30 years.
- The victim **was dead** by the time the ambulance arrived.
- I found a **dead rat** under my bed.
- Police discovered a **dead body** in the basement of the old building.

Informally, we can also use **die/dead** when an electronic device stops functioning, or when a phone or internet connection gets disconnected:

- I need to recharge my cell phone. The battery's **dead.**
- My laptop **died** and the computer repairman said he can't fix it.
- Before I could ask my question, the **line went dead.**
  (the telephone connection got cut off)

difficult / hard

Difficult is the opposite of easy. It means that something requires lots of effort to do it. **Hard** can be the opposite of "soft" (such as a hard pillow and a soft pillow) but it can also mean "difficult."

For example, you can say:

- The test was **difficult. =** The test was **hard.**
- It's **difficult** to understand the teacher. = It's **hard** to understand the teacher.

The word **hard** is a little more informal, so it's better to use **difficult** in more formal writing.

The word **hard** can also be an adverb to describe doing an action with great effort or energy. We often use it with the verbs work and try:

- She works 16 hours a day. She works very **hard.**
- He was trying **hard** not to cry.

In these cases, you cannot use "difficult."

dilemma / quandary

Both of these words are used for complicated and problematic situations, but there is a small difference between them.

A **quandary** is when you don't know what to do; you are in a state of uncertainty. A **dilemma** is a situation where you have to choose between options that all seem bad in some way.

Basically, a **quandary** is more general. In a quandary, you might not know or be able to identify the specific choices available... and although the situation is difficult, there might still be a good way to resolve it. The issue of illegal immigration in the United States is a **quandary**, because there are many different factors that make it problematic, and a solution is not clear.

In a **dilemma,** you can understand the specific choices, but all of the alternatives have some disadvantage. If you are in a great romantic relationship, and suddenly you get offered your dream job in another city far away, then you are in a dilemma because whichever choice you make will be bad in some way (bad for either your career or relationship).

dinner / supper / meal / snack

The word **meal** means any time when you eat a large amount of food. There are typically 3 meals per day - **breakfast** (in the morning), **lunch** (mid-day), and **dinner** (at night). A **snack** is a smaller amount of food (for example, a bag of chips or a piece of fruit) and you can eat a snack anytime.

In American English, **dinner** and **supper** are the same - both are used to describe the evening meal. However, in some cultures, the word **supper** is used for a light meal served in early evening, and **dinner** may be later in the night.

dirt /earth / soil

These words refer to the substance composed of particles of rocks and organic matter.

We usually use the word **soil** when talking about agriculture:

- The **soil** here is too sandy to grow crops.
- Fruit trees flourish in the fertile **soil.**
- Toxic waste from the factory has contaminated the **soil** in this area.

We usually use the word **dirt** when talking about any unclean substance:

- The dog was covered in **dirt** after playing in the garden.
- Wipe the **dirt** off your shoes before you come in the house.

Also, a road that is not paved (not covered with hard black asphalt) is called a **dirt road.**

The word **earth** can be used to talk about the world, the planet:

- The moon orbits around the **earth.**
- He is the richest man on **earth.**

However, it can also be used as a more "poetic" word to substitute the word soil:

- She filled the flowerpots with moist **earth.**
- After all the trees were cut down, nothing remained but acres of bare **earth.**

dirty / messy

If an area is **messy,** it means it is disorganized, with many various objects all over the place. A **messy** area needs to be organized and things put in their proper places.

- My desk is so **messy** – there are piles of documents everywhere. I can't find anything I need.

But if an area is **dirty,** it has accumulated dirt/dust and needs to be cleaned or washed. After you eat dinner, the plates, forks, knives, and spoons are **dirty.** After you exercise and sweat, your clothes are **dirty.**

- When my computer gets **dirty,** I clean it with a special solution that won't damage the screen.
- We drove down a very muddy road and now the car is all **dirty.**

disability / handicap / impairment

The noun **impairment** means that some ability is not as strong as normal. People can be:

- **hearing impaired**
- **visually impaired**
- **mentally impaired**

An impairment can also be temporary – your judgment and coordination become **impaired** when you drink too much alcohol, for example.

Both **disability** and **handicap** refer to a problem that prevents someone from doing normal or typical activities. People who have such problems are sometimes described as **disabled** or **handicapped** people, although the best term is to say someone **has a disability** or, when talking about these people as a group, to say **people with disabilities.**

When a building or other structure has special accommodations for people who use wheelchairs or who have other mobility difficulties, we often call these **handicap-accessible** places.

discover / find out / notice / realize

To **notice** means to perceive something with your senses - to see, hear, smell, or feel it.

- She raised her hand, but the teacher didn't **notice** her and called on another student to answer the question.
- I made a few mistakes during my piano performance, but nobody **noticed.**
- I **noticed** a strong smell of smoke in the room.
- When did you first **notice** the pain?

To **realize** means to know or understand something – or to *start* to know or understand something that you didn't know before. **Realize** is a more internal, mental act, which involves thinking about a situation or having a thought suddenly appear in your mind.

- I **realize** how important this is to you.
- They don't seem to **realize** how serious this is.
- It took some time, but he eventually **realized** that I was right.
- When she got to the bus station, she **realized** she had left her wallet at home.

Imagine that you don't wear a watch, so you don't know what time it is. You have a class that begins at 8:00 and you walk into the classroom at 8:20 and see the clock. Then you could say:

- I **noticed** what time it was and **realized** I was late.

You **noticed** the time because you saw the clock with your eyes. And after noticing the time, you **realized** you were late because you understood that you arrived later than the starting time for the class.

The words **discover** and **find out** are the same. These mean to learn about something from an outside source, such as from studying or from another person telling you. **Discover** is more formal, and **find out** is more informal and more frequently used in everyday English.

- I was sad to **find out** that my favorite teacher won't be returning next semester.
- Scientists have **discovered** that chocolate is actually good for your health.

discreet / discrete

These words are pronounced the same, and they are both adjectives.

Discrete means separate, distinct, individual:

- The two companies have a partnership, but they are **discrete** entities.
- We offer three **discrete** service plans: internet only, internet + cell phone, and internet + cell phone + TV.

Discreet describes something that is modest and does not call attention to itself:

- The photographer at the funeral remained **discreet** and respectful.
- She **discreetly** adjusted her bra strap, which was falling down her shoulder.

When you describe a person as **discreet,** it means that person can handle sensitive topics with tact (good manners and professionalism).

disease / illness

The word **disease** is more specific – it is the medical term for when the human body is not functioning correctly due to infection, genetic defects, or other problems. Cancer, AIDS, and tuberculosis are all examples of diseases. The signs of a disease are called **symptoms.**

Some common collocations with disease include:

- **a curable disease** = can be cured
- **a preventable disease** = can be prevented
- **a rare disease** = not a common disease
- **a degenerative disease**
  = a disease that makes your health get much worse over time
- **a communicable/contagious disease** = can pass from person to person
- **heart/liver disease** = a disease affecting the heart or liver
- **an outbreak of disease**
  = when a lot of people in a certain place get the disease
- **the disease spreading** = when more and more people get the disease, in an increasingly large area

The word **illness** is more general – it describes the condition of poor health, but it is not specific about what is causing the health problems.

Some common collocations with illness:

- **mental illness** = general term when someone has a mental problem. Within the general category of "mental illness," we have specific diseases, like schizophrenia
- **serious/severe illness** = an illness that is very bad
- **minor illness** = an illness that is not very bad
- **chronic illness** = an illness that does not go away
- **fatal/terminal illness** = an illness that will kill the person
- **recover from an illness** = get better after being sick

We also have a few collocations that are used with both:

- **contract/catch/develop an illness/disease**
  = begin to be sick
- **have/suffer from an illness/disease**

disinterested / uninterested

Uninterested is the opposite of interested. It simply means you have no interest in something:

- He's totally **uninterested** in traveling. He likes where he lives and never wants to leave.

- We approached the other company and proposed a partnership, but they were **uninterested.**

In casual spoken English, we tend to say "not interested" for the word uninterested.

The word **disinterested** means somebody is neutral. They have no bias (opinions that could unfairly influence their judgment). If two people are having an argument, they should present the case to a disinterested third party who can give a clear and fair evaluation of the situation.

However, some people do mistakenly use "disinterested" where "uninterested" would be more accurate.

distinct / distinctive

The word **distinct** means:

1) that something is clearly and noticeably different or separate from other things

- Three **distinct** languages are spoken in this region.
- Please make sure to keep your opinions **distinct** from the facts when writing the article.
- We're dealing with two **distinct** problems here.

2) that something is strong and obvious:

- There is a **distinct** possibility that the flight will be canceled.
- These cookies have a **distinct** cinnamon flavor.
- When I met her, I got the **distinct** impression that she didn't like me.

The word **distinctive** means that something has qualities that make it noticeably different and easy to be identified or recognized. While **distinct** is neutral, **distinctive** often has a positive connotation of being good or special:

- The male cardinal can be identified by its **distinctive** red feathers.
- His thoughtful and poetic lyrics are a **distinctive** characteristic of his music.
- One **distinctive** feature of this software is that it can automatically translate text from 50 languages.

do / make

DO generally refers to the action itself, and **MAKE** usually implies that there is a result. For example, if you "make breakfast," the result is an omelet! If you "make a suggestion," you have created a recommendation.

Use **DO** for actions, obligations, and repetitive tasks:

- do the laundry
- do homework
- do the shopping
- do business
- do well / do badly (in general)
- do the right thing

Use **MAKE** for creating or producing something, and for actions you choose to do:

- make breakfast/lunch/dinner
- make your own peanut butter
- make money *(= earn money)*
- make friends *(= meet people and start friendships)*
- make a suggestion/comment/complaint/confession/excuse/promise
- make plans
- make a list
- make a decision

dress / dressed / wear

A **dress** (n.) is a type of clothing that women wear:

The words **dressed (adj.)** and **get dressed (v.)** can be used with both men AND women.

"Get dressed" means to put on your clothes (the opposite is "get undressed"): You get dressed in the morning, or after taking a shower, and you get undressed at night.

The word "dressed" can also be used to describe what someone is currently wearing. This guy is **dressed** in jeans and a yellow shirt.

The verb **wear** is also used to describe the current state of someone's clothing: He's **wearing** jeans and a yellow shirt. The past tense of "wear" is "wore": Yesterday it was cold, so I **wore** a sweater.

To **dress up (v.)** means to wear clothing that is *special;* clothing that is nicer than your regular everyday clothes. You would **dress up** to go to a formal banquet:

You can also use **dress up as** for costumes. The picture shows a man **dressed up as** superman.

Image sources: Vinod2012, Ken Stokes, Dave & Margie Hill / Kleerup

during / while / meanwhile / meantime

All of these words describe when two things are happening simultaneously (at the same time). Let's start with **during** and **while.**

Use **during** before a *noun:*

- The people sitting in front of me were talking **during** the movie.
- My boss seemed to be in a rush; she kept checking her watch **during** our meeting.

Use **while** before a *subject + verb:*

- We'll buy the tickets **while** you wait in line for the popcorn.
- The doorbell rang **while** I was taking a shower.

Sometimes, when the subject of the two actions is the same, we eliminate the second mention of the subject:

- **Emily** broke her leg **while she was playing** soccer.
  = **Emily** broke her leg **while playing** soccer.
- **I** like to listen to music **while I'm exercising**.
  = **I** like to listen to music **while exercising**.

We cannot do this when the subjects of the two actions are *different:*

- **I** chopped the vegetables while **my brother** prepared the meat.
  Two different subjects for the actions – "I" and "my brother"

Meanwhile is the same as while, but it is used only at the beginning of a sentence - and usually when there are two different subjects doing the two actions:

- I was watching TV **while** my brother was studying.
  = I was watching TV. **Meanwhile,** my brother was studying.

In the meantime usually implies you are doing an action while waiting for something else to happen.

- I will send you the text for the brochure tomorrow. **In the meantime,** you can start working on the graphics.
- Chris will graduate from college next year. **In the meantime,** he's saving up money to buy a house.

early / soon

The word **soon** means a short time after now, a short time in the future.

- If right now it is April, and Harry will graduate from college in May, then he'll be graduating from college **soon.**
- If it's 5:30 and I will be home at 6:00, then I will get home from work **soon.**

The word **early** has two meanings:

1) Near the beginning of a particular period of time

- I'll be traveling **early** next month.
  (= between the 1st and the 10th of the month)
- She gets up very **early** in the morning.
  (= probably around 5 AM)
- **Early** in his career, he worked at Microsoft.
  (= in the beginning of his career)

2) Before the expected time

- If most people graduate after 4 years, but Harry did intensive study and will graduate after 3 years, then he will graduate **early.**
- If I normally get home from work at 6:00 PM but today I'm coming home at 3:00 PM, then I'm coming home **early.**
- If a project must be completed by December 31 but I complete it by December 15, then I have finished it **early.**

earn / gain / win

To **win** is to be #1 in a competition, or to receive an award.

- My soccer team **won** the game 3-1.
- I want to **win** the lottery!
- John **won** a prize in the science competition.

You can **win** a game, a race, a match, a competition, or the lottery. You can also **win** a medal (like in the Olympics), a prize, or an award.

To **earn** something is to get something in exchange for your work or effort, for example: a salary.

- Sarah is a famous lawyer; she **earns** a lot of money.
- I'm not rich, but I **earn** a decent salary.
- My bank account **earns** 2% interest per month.

To **gain** something is simply to get or increase – not necessarily because of action:

- I've **gained** five pounds since I stopped exercising.
- Jack's car **gained** speed as he drove down the mountain.
- The company is **gaining** international recognition.

e.g. / i.e.

Both of these abbreviations come from Latin phrases:

- **e.g.** = *exempli gratia* (for example) – used to introduce examples
- **i.e.** = *id est* (that is) – used to say something in other words, in order to make things clearer or provide more information

Here are some examples of how to use **e.g.:**

- He hates studying the sciences, **e.g.** biology, chemistry, and physics.
  *(biology, chemistry, and physics are **examples of** sciences)*

- The after-school program focuses on team sports, **e.g.** soccer and basketball.
  *(soccer and basketball are **examples of** the team sports in the program)*
- Her report contains many mistakes, **e.g.** the economic statistics are completely inaccurate.
  *(the error in the statistics is an **example of** the mistakes in the report)*

We typically only use **e.g.** in writing. When speaking, we would simply say "for example," "such as," or "like" instead.

Here are some similar examples of how to use **i.e.:**

- He hates studying the sciences, **i.e.** he has no interest in being a chemist like his father.
  (the second statement provides more information that logically follows from the first statement)
- The after-school program focuses on team sports, **i.e.** it aims to help children learn to work together.
  (the first and second statements are two different ways to express the activities of the after-school program)
- Her report contains many mistakes, **i.e.** it needs to be revised.
  (again, the first and second statements are two ways to talk about the problems with the report)

We typically only use **i.e.** in writing. When speaking, we would use "that is" or "in other words" instead.

economic / economical

The adjective **economic** describes things related to the economy:

- The country is undergoing a period of strong **economic** growth.
- After the recession, the **economic** recovery has been slower than expected.

The field of study of the economy is called **economics** (always plural):

- He is a specialist in **economics.**
- She would like to study **economics** at university.

The adjective **economical** refers to something that saves money; it is an efficient use of money.

- This is an **economical** car, it doesn't use much gasoline.
- Short trips inside the country are more **economical** than traveling internationally.

effective / efficient

If something is **effective,** it means it achieves the desired effect/result:

- This vaccine is quite **effective** against the disease.
  (= the vaccine has the desired result of preventing the disease)
- The new law was **ineffective** in reducing crime.
  (= the law did not achieve the desired result of reducing crime)

As you can see in the last example, the opposite of effective is **ineffective.**

If something is **efficient,** it means it is done in a good way, without wasting time, money, or energy:

- E-mail is more **efficient** than regular mail.
  (= e-mail saves time that is normally wasted with regular mail)
- When I bought a more energy-**efficient** air conditioner, my electrical bill went down. *(= the new air conditioner uses less energy)*
- That office is so **inefficient** – it took five weeks to process a simple document!
  (= that office wastes time and complicates matters)

As you can see in the last example, the opposite of efficient is **inefficient.**

either / neither

Either… or is used for ONE thing, but NOT the other.

- You can choose one flavor of ice cream – **either** chocolate **or** vanilla.
- We can **either** go shopping **or** see a movie, but we won't have time to do both.

Neither… nor is used for NOT TWO THINGS. You can also say **Neither of** + two things:

- I don't like soccer. I don't like tennis. I like **neither** soccer **nor** tennis.
- I have two brothers. **Neither of** my brothers have blue eyes.

Neither is also used for **agreeing with a negative comment.** A "negative comment" is any phrase with a negative auxiliary verb: don't, didn't, haven't, can't, won't, etc.

- "I like strawberry ice cream." (positive comment)
  "Me too!"
- "I don't like strawberry ice cream." (negative comment)
  "Me neither."
- "I've been to Europe several times." (positive comment)
  "Me too."
- "I've never been to Europe." (negative comment)
  "Me neither."
- "I can speak Chinese." (positive comment)
  "Me too."
- "I can't speak Chinese." (negative comment)
  "Me neither."

The phrase **"Me either"** is not technically correct, but many people say it in spoken English instead of "Me neither"!

electric / electrical / electronic

This is a doubt that even native English speakers have!

Electric and **electrical** are essentially the same – they refer to any device that uses electricity. Flashlights are electric; we also have **electric lights** and **electric heaters**, and nowadays even **electric cars.** Something that is **electric** just uses electricity for energy.

Something that is **electronic** is a more complex system – it manipulates the electrical energy in ways that allow for more advanced functions, such as

transmitting information. Computers are **electronic,** and we also use **electronic** for digital versions of things in the physical world, like **electronic stores/books.**

empathy / sympathy

Empathy refers to the ability to deeply understand and share someone else's feelings or situation. The verb form is **empathize.** For example, if you were bullied or made fun of as a child, you have **empathy** with kids who are currently being bullied. If you started your own company and you know how challenging it is, you can **empathize** with someone who is doing the same thing.

It's also possible to feel **empathy** even if you haven't had direct experience of a situation. A nurse can have deep **empathy** for her patients, even if she has never been hospitalized herself. But she is familiar with her patients' situations, sensitive to their feelings, and listens to them express their emotions.

The noun **sympathy** can mean:

1) You feel sorry because another person is sad, or because something bad happened to that person. When somebody's relative dies, you express your **sympathy** for their loss. (Sometimes people express **heartfelt sympathy** or their **deepest sympathy** – for emphasis).
2) If you are **in sympathy with** someone, it means you agree with them, or your goals are in line with their goals. If you work for an organization that helps poor people, and your friend has a project to provide school supplies to poor children, then his work is **in sympathy with** yours.

The verb **sympathize** can be used for feeling bad for someone:

- We **sympathize** with the victims' families.
  (= we feel sorry because they have lost a loved one)

It can also be used for agreeing with goals or thoughts:

- He **sympathizes** with a radical political party.
  (= he tends to agree with that party's philosophies)

To summarize, **empathy** is when you feel what another person feels (it can be good or bad feelings). **Sympathy** is when you feel bad for another person's sadness, or when your thoughts/goals are in line with someone else's.

employees / staff

Both of these words refer to people who work at a company – but **staff** is always *singular and uncountable* – it describes the entire group of workers as one thing. **Employees** is *plural and countable* – it describes the collection of individual workers.

- The entire **staff was** happy about the extra day off.
- All the **employees were** happy about the extra day off.

Note that "staff" takes the singular verb **was,** and "employees" takes the plural verb **were.**

Whenever you use a specific number, use **employees** or **staff members:**

- Thirty **employees** received raises.
- Thirty **staff members** received raises.
- ~~Thirty **staff** received raises.~~

end / finish

When something **ends,** it means it **stops**:

- The semester **ends** in June.
- I **ended** my last relationship because I felt we had nothing in common.

When something **finishes,** it means it is **completed:**

- She **finished** the test and gave it to the teacher.
- We need to **finish** painting the house.

enough / too

Enough means you have what is sufficient/necessary; **too** means you have *more* than what is sufficient/necessary. There are a few important details about their word order in the sentence:

TOO

too + adjective	This shirt is **too expensive**. It costs $30 and I have only $25.
too much + uncountable noun	I drank **too much water**; now I really need to go to the bathroom!
too many + countable noun	She put **too many eggs** into the cake. The recipe said 3 and she used 5.
verb + too much	He **complains too much**. He has such a negative attitude.

ENOUGH

enough + noun (countable or uncountable)	We don't have **enough people** for a soccer team. We have 8 people and a team needs at least 11.
adjective + enough	Sorry kid, you're not **old enough** to buy alcohol. You're 19 and the minimum age is 21. ~~**enough old**~~
verb + enough	I don't **exercise enough**. I need to go to the gym more than once a month.

enquire / inquire

Both of these verbs are used for asking about something or looking for information. The nouns for the request / investigation are **enquiry** and **inquiry.**

Technically, **enquire** is used for "ask" in general ("He **enquired** about prices for the products"), and **inquire** for a more formal investigation ("The police will make an **inquiry** into the alleged corruption.")

However, in American English it is now very common to use **inquire** for everything: "He **inquired** about prices for the products."

especially / specially

Use **especially** when something stands out from all the others (similar to the meaning of "particularly.")

- The whole book was terrible – **especially** the ending.
- He loves animals, **especially** dogs.
- I can't wait for the trip to New York. I'm **especially** looking forward to seeing the Statue of Liberty.

Especially can also be used before an adjective with a meaning like "very" or "extremely."

- It's **especially** important to arrive on time for your first day of class.
- All the desserts were great, but the cherry pie was **especially** delicious.

If something was designed specifically for a special purpose, use **specially:**

- The bus has been **specially** designed to accommodate passengers in wheelchairs.
- These dogs are **specially** trained to detect drugs.
- The decorations were **specially** made for the wedding.

every day / everyday

Everyday (one word) is an adjective to describe something else:

- It's easy to get stressed out by **everyday** problems.
  (everyday describes problems)
- These shoes are great for **everyday** wear.
  (everyday describes wear)

When talking about how frequently something occurs, use **every day** (two words):

- I study English **every day.**
- I walk my dog **every day.**

ex- / former / previous

Previous means "immediately before," and **former** means "at any time in the past."

- Your **former** employer means any employer you have had in your past, at any time.
- Your **previous** employer typically means the most recent employer you had in your past.
- A **former** president is any of the many people who have held the position of president in the past.
- The **previous** president is the most recent president before the current one.

We usually use **ex-** with romantic partners from the past: **ex-husband, ex-wife, ex-boyfriend, ex-girlfriend.** Another common term is **ex-convict** or **ex-con:** someone who has been convicted of a crime and spent time in prison, but has now been released.

Although it's possible to use ex- with other roles, it's not very common. "Ex-" is rather informal. However, it is sometimes used in newspaper headlines to save space (**Ex-leader** of an organization, **ex-foreign minister** of a country, etc.)

explore / exploit

To **explore** (verb) is to investigate or travel to a new area in order to discover things. **Exploration** is neutral:

- The satellite will **explore** the area outside our solar system.
- We are **exploring** the possibility of a business partnership.

To **exploit** (verb) is to take advantage of something, usually in a selfish or unethical way. **Exploitation** is bad:

- Europeans **exploited** African slave labor to build their colonies.
- Jerry has a long history of sexually **exploiting** children.

To complicate matters, the word **exploit** can also be a noun – referring to significant actions or achievements. This word is neutral.

- I started a blog to update my family on my **exploits** in foreign countries.

extend / expand

Both of these words mean to get bigger, or to make something bigger.

Extend has more the sense of making something *longer in one direction,* whereas **expand** gets *bigger in all directions:*

- You **extend** a TV antenna.
- A balloon **expands** when you blow it up.
- You **extend** your arm.
- A pregnant woman's belly **expands.**

We also use **extend,** not expand, when making a period of time longer:

- **extend** a visit
- **extend** a deadline

We use **expand** when talking about businesses or areas getting bigger:

- The company **expanded** its operations to five additional countries.

- The town is **expanding –** many new houses are being built.
- The bookstore plans to **expand** its range of products to include CDs and DVDs.

famous / infamous

The word **famous** means a lot of people know about a person or thing:

- She's a **famous** singer who has sold millions of albums.
- This restaurant is **famous** for its steak. People come from miles away to eat it.

The word **infamous** means someone or something is well-known *because they are connected to bad behavior or something negative.*

- Police finally captured the **infamous** serial killer who had terrorized the city for more than seven years.
- The **infamous** photo proving the president guilty of the crime was published in newspapers around the world.

There's also a pronunciation difference:

- famous: FA – mus (A as in make)
- infamous: IN – fu – mus

You might be wondering what the opposite of "famous" is. If not many people know about a person or thing, then we call it **unknown** or **little-known.**

farther / further

The word **farther** is used for distances:

- I ran 3 miles, but my sister ran 5 miles. She ran 2 miles **farther** than me.
- Philadelphia is just a two-hour drive away, but Washington is **farther** - it takes about 5 hours to get there.

You can remember it because farther has the word "far" in it - which refers to physical distance.

The word **further** is used for metaphorical distance - such as time or progress - to mean "additional" or "to a greater extent."

- He interrupted me before I could say anything **further.**
- In order for the research to proceed **further,** we need more funding.
- We've waited long enough; we need to publish this article without **further** delay.

However, the dictionary does say that **further** can also be used for physical distance:

- There's a gas station about ten miles **farther/further** down the road.

Finally, the word **furthermore** means "in addition" and is used to introduce a phrase:

- I don't recommend that school. It's expensive and the teachers are not very good. **Furthermore,** it has neither a library nor a computer lab.

The word **furthermore** is a bit formal, and when speaking everyday English we would usually say "Plus" or "Also" instead.

fee / fare / tax

These words describe an amount of money that needs to be paid – but they're used in different situations.

Fare is used only for transportation:

- The **bus fare** is the cost of the bus ticket
- The **train fare** is the cost of the train ticket
- The **taxi fare** is the cost of taking a taxi
- **Airfare** is the cost of a plane ticket

Fee can describe:

- **The money charged for some professional service.** You pay a fee for lawyers, counselors, maids, etc.
- **The money charged by an institution or for administration:**
    - Schools charge **tuition fees.**

- When you do something official like get a driver's license or register a marriage, you may need to pay an **administrative fee** for the paperwork to be processed.
- When you apply to colleges or schools, you often have to pay an **application fee.**

The word **tax** refers to the money you need to pay the government. Most countries have an **income tax –** meaning a part of your salary is paid to the government. Tax money helps pay for public projects and infrastructure.

female / feminine / woman

Woman is a noun (used with a/an/the) and **female** is an adjective (which describes a noun). So we say:

- She is the country's first **female** president.
  ~~woman president~~
- The president of the country is a **woman.**
  ~~a female~~

There is a similar rule with **male** (adjective) and **man** (noun):

- **Male** life expectancy is often lower than **female** life expectancy.
  (male / female are adjectives describing the noun "life expectancy")
- **Women** live longer than **men.**

It is possible to use "female" and "male" as nouns, but this is usually only done when talking about animals – or when writing scientific papers where humans are part of the experiment:

- The treatment was given to three **males** and three **females** between ages 40 and 45.
- There are nine puppies available for adoption – seven **males** and two **females.**

Masculine and **feminine** are also adjectives which describe things that are like what people perceive to be typical of a man / typical of a woman.

- Pink is considered a **feminine** color.
  (women typically enjoy/wear pink; men typically do not)
- American football is considered a **masculine** sport.
  (men typically play/enjoy American football; women typically do not)

few / little / less / fewer

Few is used with countable nouns, and **little** is used with uncountable nouns:

- I have a **little money.**
  (money = uncountable)
- I have a **few dollars.**
  (dollars = countable)
- There's **little entertainment** in this town.
  (entertainment = uncountable)
- There are **few nightclubs** in this town.
  (nightclubs = countable)

One important detail:

- **little** is used with a negative connotation ("not much")
- **a little** is used when it's a positive connotation ("better than nothing!")

It's the same with **"few"** and **"a few":**

- He's not very popular. He has **few friends.**
  (= a bad thing)
- He has **a few friends** that he hangs out with all the time.
  (= a good thing)
- She's not qualified for the job because she has **little experience** in this area.
  (= a bad thing)
- She could do this job; she has **a little experience** in this area.
  (= a good thing)

Fewer and **less** are the comparative forms:

Base Form	Comparative	Superlative
few	fewer	fewest
little	less	least

- If I made 8 mistakes on the test, John made 5 mistakes, and Harriet only made 2 mistakes, then: I made **few** mistakes on the test, but John made **fewer** mistakes than me, and Harriet made the **fewest** mistakes.
- If I have $20, John has $12, and Harriet has only $3, then: I have **little** money, John has **less** money than me, and Harriet has the **least** money out of all of us.

One very common MISTAKE in the United States is signs in supermarkets that say "Ten items or less" for the express checkout lanes. The correct way is "Ten items or fewer" – because the word "items" is countable!

fit / match / suit

These words are all used when something is appropriate or perfect for a situation. They are also used when talking about clothing.

When two things **match,** it means they are equal, or very similar so they appear nice together.

- I'm buying a yellow hat to **match** my yellow jacket.
- Your socks don't **match** – one is black and the other is brown.
- That modern lamp doesn't **match** the old-fashioned decor in the bedroom.
- I think he's telling the truth; his story **matches** the evidence.

Whereas **match** usually refers to color and appearance, **fit** refers to size. If a piece of clothing **fits,** it means it is the correct *size or shape:*

- These shoes don't **fit** me; I need a larger size.
- It's hard for me to buy pants because I'm tall - but these jeans **fit** me perfectly!
- The table won't **fit** through the doorway; we'll need to take it apart to get it inside.

We can also use **fit** in a more metaphorical sense to mean when somebody belongs in a group; their personality or characteristics are compatible with the others:

- Let's hire him – he has a positive attitude and seems like a good **fit** for the company.
- When I was in high school, I loved to study and I felt like I didn't **fit** in with the popular kids, who were all athletes.

The verb **suit,** when talking about clothing, is used more generally for when a certain style looks good on somebody:

- That green shirt really **suits** you. It brings out the color of your eyes.

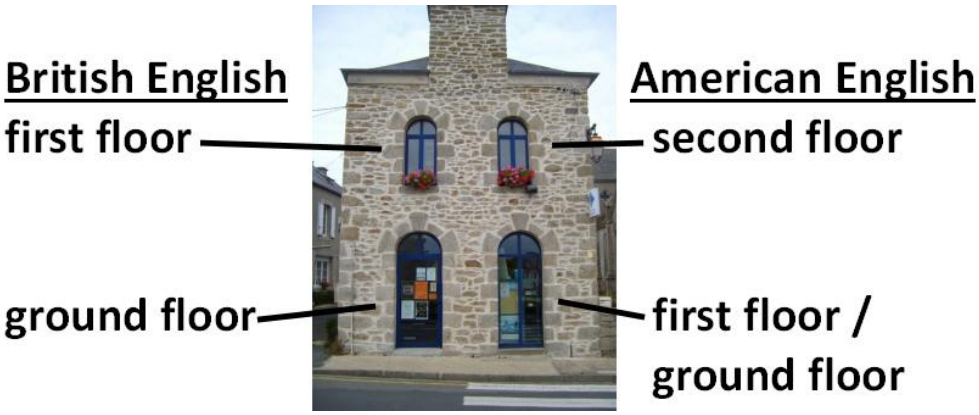
More generally, the verb **suit** means to be appropriate for. We often use the adjective form **suitable:**

- My new job **suits** me much better than my old job – I feel like it's more in line with my career goals.
- Flip-flops aren't **suitable** for hiking; you need shoes that will protect your feet.
- The comedy movie is more **suitable** for children than the action movie.

floor / ground

Usually we say **floor** for indoor surfaces, and **ground** for outdoor surfaces. Inside your house, you would drop your bag on the floor. Outside your house, you would drop your bag on the ground.

The different levels of a building are also called **floors.** There is a difference here between British and American English:



There are a few specific outdoor surfaces that are called a floor: **the ocean floor, the forest floor, the floor of a cave.**

All other outdoor surfaces are called the **ground.** After it rains, the ground may be wet and muddy. An airplane leaves the ground when it takes off, and a subway is a train that runs underground (under the surface of the earth).

The word **grounds** refers to the land surrounding a large building. **The school grounds** means the area of property around the school building, which belongs to the school. Hospitals, castles, palaces, and mansions may also have grounds. (The tiny area of land around individual houses is typically called a **yard**).

for / since

Use **for** with *periods* of time: I've been studying English **for** two years.

- **for…**
    - three years
    - two weeks
    - four days
    - five hours
    - ten minutes
    - three decades
    - two centuries

Use **since** with measuring the time after a *specific point* in time:

I've been studying English **since** 2010.

- **since…**
    - 9:00
    - 1973
    - Monday
    - February
    - last Christmas
    - I was a child
    - I graduated from college

As you can see from the last few examples, you don't necessarily need to use a specific date with **since.** Let's say I graduated from college in 2004 and now it's 2014. I could say:

- I've been working at this company **since** 2004.
- I've been working at this company **since** I graduated from college.

Again, **since** measures backwards to a specific point in time.

forest / jungle / wood / woods

All of these words refer to an area with lots of trees and other vegetation close together.

The word **jungle** refers to a tropical area (it can also be called a **rain forest**). The Amazon in Brazil is an example of a jungle.

In non-tropical areas, land filled with trees can be called **the forest** or **the woods:**

- We went camping **in the forest / in the woods.**
- The frightened fox ran across the parking lot and then disappeared into the **forest/woods.**

We usually say "the woods" – when it is necessary to use "a," we typically use forest:

- There is **a large forest** in the eastern part of the state.
- ~~There is a large woods~~

The word **wood** is used for the substance that comes from trees and is used in construction and to make furniture and other objects:

- This table is made of **wood.**
- A small **wooden** cross marked the burial site.
  "wooden" is the adjective meaning "made of wood."

If we are talking about multiple pieces of wood, then we say "pieces of wood" and not "woods":

- We gathered a few **pieces of wood** to start a fire.
  ~~a few woods~~

fun / funny

The word **fun (adj. or n.)** means something is enjoyable; you like doing it.

- Amusement parks are **fun.**
- I think playing soccer is more **fun** than playing basketball.
- We had **fun** at the party.

The word **funny (adj.)** means something makes you laugh; it is full of comedy:

- The movie is really **funny.** It's a romantic comedy.
- I heard a **funny** story yesterday.
- That comedian is so **funny.** I can't stop laughing at his jokes!

girl / lady / woman

In the past, the distinction between lady and woman used to be clearer:

- **woman** = general word for a female adult
- **man** = general word for a male adult
- **lady** = an honorable woman with good manners and refined behavior
- **gentleman** = an honorable man with good manners and refined behavior

Nowadays, however, there is not so much of a difference. Although the words **lady** and **gentleman** still carry some connotation of being refined and well-mannered, people often use the words even to describe people they don't know.

- An old **lady** fainted at the train station and they had to call an ambulance.
- Good evening, **gentlemen.** Can I get you anything to drink?

The word **girl** is usually only used for female children or adolescents. Adult women sometimes refer to their friends as girls, but it can be considered offensive for an adult man to refer to adult women as "girls."

good / well

Good is an adjective; it describes *nouns:*

- That's a **good** idea!
- The food at that restaurant is really **good.**

Well is an adverb; it describes *verbs:*

- She performed **well** in the competition.
  ~~She performed **good**~~
- I know him **well**; we've been friends for years.

Use good *before* the noun (good idea) or after a form of the verb "to be" (the food is good; the drinks are good; the party was good).

Use well *after* the verb - He sings well, they dance well, I didn't sleep very well.

There is one exception - when somebody asks **"How are you?"** native English speakers often say "Good!" or "I'm good!" Although this is not technically correct, it is much more common to say "I'm good" than "I'm well" in response to this question.

good evening / good night

Evening is the time when the sky starts to get dark – usually around 6-8 PM.
Night is the time when it is dark and people are generally sleeping.

Say **"Good evening"** to say **"hello"** after 6:00 PM. "Good evening" is commonly used at restaurants, in a professional context, and in speeches (when you speak in front of a large number of people):

- "**Good evening,** do you have a reservation?" (at a restaurant)
- "**Good evening,** Tom. How are you?" (to a colleague)
- "**Good evening,** ladies and gentlemen…" (in a speech)

In general, "good evening" is a little more formal. Friends don't normally say "good evening" to each other – they would say "Hi" or "What's up?" or another informal greeting.

Say **"Good night"** to say **"goodbye"** – when you are leaving to go home. Family members also say "good night" when they are going to bed.

- "**Good night,** Janet. See you tomorrow." (at work)
- "**Good night,** mom. I'm going to bed." (at home)

gratuity / tip

When you go to a restaurant in the United States, it is customary to pay extra money for the service of your waiter or waitress. This extra money is called the **tip** or **gratuity.**

Usually you, the customer, decide how much money you want to leave as a tip (it is customary to leave between 10% and 20%).

However, in some restaurants, the restaurant automatically adds an extra percentage to the bill, which is listed as **"gratuity."** Restaurants often do this when there is a table with a lot of people. It is a way of automatically making sure that a tip is paid. When there is a charge for gratuity on your bill, then you don't need to add an additional tip; the gratuity is the tip.

guarantee / warranty

The word **guarantee** just refers to a promise that certain conditions will be fulfilled. We can use it with products, or with things that are not products:

- All our products come with a 30-day money-back **guarantee.**
- I **guarantee** you will enjoy the experience.
- We **guarantee** the accuracy of the information in our reports.

A **warranty** is a specific type of guarantee – it is ONLY used for products, and it is a promise that if the product breaks, the seller or manufacturer will fix it or replace the product.

gut / guts

The word **gut** refers to a part of the body, but it has some metaphorical meanings, too. Your "gut" is your stomach. Some men have a **"beer gut"** (a big stomach from drinking too much beer!) and some people talk about wanting to do exercise to "**lose their gut"** (make their stomach smaller).

We also have the expressions **gut reaction** or **gut feelings.** These are feelings you have when you are certain that you're correct, but you can't explain why logically. It's just a strong feeling from deep inside you. For example:

- When I met Bob, I had a **gut feeling** that he was dishonest.

Guts in the plural form refers to the *inside* of your stomach – your intestines and internal organs. But it's also used to mean courage or bravery. If someone "has the guts to do something," then they have enough courage to do it:

- I don't **have the guts** to go skydiving.

Or if something requires courage, you can say it "takes guts":

- My brother corrected his boss during a meeting in front of all the other employees. **That takes guts.**
- Steve moved to a country where he didn't speak the language at all - **that takes guts!**

hard / hardly

Hard can be an adjective or an adverb – and the adjective form has two meanings!

- This **book** is too **hard** for me. I can't read it.
  (hard = adjective = difficult)
- This **mattress** is too **hard.** I can't sleep.
  (hard = adjective = rigid, the opposite of "soft")
- She's **working hard** to finish the project by tomorrow.
  (hard = adverb = intensely)

Hardly has a completely different meaning. It means "almost not."

- We have a bad connection – I can **hardly hear** you.
  (= I almost can't hear you)
- The teacher talks so fast, I can **hardly understand** her.
  (= I almost can't understand her)

Another word to use in this case is **barely.**

have / have got

You can use either **have** or **have got** when "have" is the main verb (in the case of possession):

- **Do** you **have** a pencil?
  = **Have** you **got** a pencil?
- He **has** a lot of work to do this weekend.
  = He**'s got** a lot of work to do this weekend.
- We **have** a big problem here.
  = We**'ve got** a big problem here.
- She **doesn't have** a boyfriend.
  = She **hasn't got** a boyfriend.
- They **don't have** any money.
  = They **haven't got** any money.

These sentences are all correct.

You CAN'T use "have got" in expressions like "have breakfast" or "have fun," because these are not things that you possess:

- I **have** breakfast at 6 AM.
  ~~**I've got** breakfast at 6 AM.~~
- I **had fun** at the party.
  ~~**I'd got** fun at the party.~~

have to / must / need to

These words are all used for obligations – things that are necessary and required.

Must is the most formal. It is usually used in official rules (and is not as common in spoken English):

- Students **must** register for classes by August 1.
- You **must** possess a valid driver's license to apply for this job.

NEVER use the word "to" after must. "Must to" does not exist!

In everyday English, **need to**, **have to,** and **got to** (informal) are more common ways of expressing obligations:

- We **need to** buy some milk – there's none in the refrigerator.
- My son **needs to** get a haircut; his hair is getting really long.
- I **have to** leave work early today in order to pick up my kids from school.
- Sarah works at a restaurant, so she **has to** work nights and weekends.
- We've been really stressed out lately; we **gotta** (got to) take a vacation.

When talking about actions you need to do, ALWAYS use the word "to" after need/have and before the verb:

- ~~We **need buy** some milk~~
- ~~I **have leave** work early~~

When spoken fast:

- "need to" sounds like ***needa***
- "needs to" sounds like ***needsta***
- "have to" sounds like ***hafta***
- "has to" sounds like ***hasta***
- "got to" sounds like ***gotta***

Be careful when using the negative form. **Mustn't** is different from **"don't need to"** and **"don't have to."** Mustn't means something is prohibited/forbidden, but "don't need to" and "don't have to" mean something is not required; it is optional.

- You **mustn't** smoke inside the hospital.
- You **don't need to** buy a ticket; the concert is free.
- You **don't have to** go to the extra review session; it's an optional class.

haven't / don't have

The verb **have** is used both as a **main verb** and as a **helping verb:**

- **Main verb (possession):**
  I **have** a computer. I **have** a dog.
- **Helping verb (present perfect):**
  I **have** done my homework. We **have** finished the work.

There are two ways to make the negative form of have:

1. Don't have / Doesn't have
2. Haven't / Hasn't

When "have" is the **main verb,** then the negative form is **don't/doesn't have:**

- **Positive:** I **have** a car.
- **Negative:** I **don't have** a car.
- **Incorrect:** I **haven't** a car.

Here's an example with "has":

- **Positive:** She **has** a dog.
- **Negative:** She **doesn't have** a dog.
- **Incorrect:** She **hasn't** a dog

With possession, you can't use **haven't/hasn't.**

When "have" is the **helping verb** (in the present perfect) then use **haven't / hasn't**:

- **Correct:** I **haven't finished** my homework yet.
- **Incorrect:** I **don't have finished** my homework yet.
- **Correct:** She **hasn't spoken** to me for three weeks.
- **Incorrect:** She **doesn't have spoken** to me for three weeks.

hear / listen

There are two differences between **listen** and **hear:**

Listen is often a prolonged action, but **hear** is just one moment in time:

- While I was **listening** to the news, I **heard** that there was a plane crash outside the city.
  ("listening to the news" = continuous action, "heard" = one specific moment)

Listen is often intentional, but **hear** is often unintentional.

- After I **heard** a loud noise downstairs, I **listened** carefully to see if a robber had entered the house.
  ("heard a loud noise" = without trying; "listened carefully" = trying)

However, there are some exceptions in which "hear" is used with intention:

- I **heard** *(= listened to)* an interesting show on the radio last night.

Listen is always followed by **to.** Don't use "to" after **hear.**

- I'm **listening to** a podcast.
  ~~I'm **listening** a podcast.~~
- I can't **hear** the TV. Turn the volume up.

Always use **hear** when you know or find out about a piece of news (usually we say "hear that" or "hear about")

- I **hear that** it's supposed to rain this weekend.
  ~~I **listen that** it's supposed to rain this weekend.~~
- Have you **heard about** the new gym that's opening on Main Street?

hijack / kidnap

You **hijack** a vehicle - such as a car, train, or airplane - taking control of it by using force. You **kidnap** a person - take and hold the person against their will, often demanding money to release them.

historic / historical

The word **historical** describes anything related to the past, to history:

- We need to consider the current conflict from a **historical** perspective.
- The city center contains many cultural and **historical** monuments.
- I love reading **historical** fiction.

Historical things can be important or unimportant.

The word **historic** describes things that were very important or influential in history (or a current event that will likely be regarded as important in the future).

- The army's **historic** victory was the turning point in the war.
- Apollo 11 was the **historic** spaceflight that brought the first humans to the moon.
- This is a **historic** treaty – it is the first time there has ever been a peace agreement in the region.

holiday / vacation

A **holiday** is a special day for religious or cultural reasons – such as Christmas, Easter, New Year's Eve, and your country's Independence Day. Some holidays are also official days off from work, and others are not.

A **vacation** is when you take multiple days off from work/school to relax and/or travel. However, American English speakers call this a **vacation** and British English speakers call this a **holiday:**

- My parents are **on vacation** in Asia. (American English)
- My parents are **on holiday** in Asia. (British English)

hope / wish

The word **wish** is usually used for hypothetical (**imagined**) situations, when you want something in the present or past to be different.

When you're wishing a *present situation* was different, use **wish + simple past:**

- I live near the beach, but I **wish** I **lived** near the mountains.
- I **wish** my mother **knew** how to use a computer, but she's terrible with technology.
- I'm very busy and I have no free time. I **wish** I **didn't** have to work so much.
- Getting a visa to travel to the U.S. is difficult. I **wish** the process **wasn't** so complicated.

When you're wishing a *past situation* was different, use **wish + past perfect:**

- I didn't go to college. I **wish** I **had gone** to college when I had the chance.
- I wasn't expecting your visit. I **wish** you **had called** me first.
- Yesterday I got angry at my best friend. I **wish** I **hadn't said** she was stupid.
- I **wish** I **hadn't seen** that horror movie. I've been having nightmares for the past week!

The word **hope** is used when you want a specific result, and when there is (or was) **a real possibility** of getting that result.

When you are hoping for a result in the future, you can use either **hope + present** or **hope + will + verb** (they are equal; there is no difference):

- I bought a present for my girlfriend.
  I hope **she likes** it. **OR** I hope **she'll like** it.
- My final English exam is this Friday.
  I hope I **get** a good grade. **OR** I hope **I'll get** a good grade.
- The festival is next Saturday.
  I hope it **doesn't** rain. **OR** I hope it **won't** rain.

You can also use hope in the **past continuous, past perfect,** or **past perfect continuous,** when you wanted a result, but that result didn't happen:

- I **was hoping** my girlfriend would like the present I bought her, but she hated it.
- I **had hoped** to get a good grade on my English exam, but I failed.
- I'**d been hoping** it wouldn't rain, but there was a huge thunderstorm and the festival was canceled.

hopefully / thankfully

You can say **hopefully** about something you want to happen (but you do not know if it will happen or not). Say **thankfully** about an established fact.

Both "hopefully" and "thankfully" can be used in the past, present, or future – but **thankfully** is about *confirmed facts* and **hopefully** is about *unconfirmed facts:*

Future:

- **Hopefully,** this project will be finished by the end of the month.
  (= I'm not sure if it will be finished by the end of the month or not, but I want it to)
- **Thankfully,** this project will be finished by the end of the month.
  (= The project will definitely be finished by that time)

Present:

- **Hopefully,** there isn't a long line at the bank.
  (= I am not yet at the bank, so I don't know if the line is long or not)
- **Thankfully,** there isn't a long line at the bank.
  (= I am at the bank now, and I can see that the line is not long)

Past:

- **Hopefully,** George got home safely last night.
  (= I don't know if he got home safely or not)
- **Thankfully,** George got home safely last night.
  (= I know for a fact that George is OK – perhaps he called me and confirmed it)

hostel / hotel / motel

A **hotel** is a place you stay while traveling or on vacation.

The word **motel** comes from "motor hotel" and is a hotel for motorists (drivers). They are usually found near highways, so you can stay there when you are driving a long distance and need to stop for the night. Motels usually have very basic facilities, and are less expensive than hotels. The doors to motel rooms are often on the outside.

Hostels have dormitory rooms with multiple beds, so you share the room with other travelers. Hostel rooms may have men only, women only, or they may be mixed – and some hostels do offer private rooms as well. A hostel is also typically less expensive than a hotel. Students and backpackers often stay in hostels.

Note the pronunciation difference in these words: **hotel** and **motel** have the o sound in the word "no," and the "o" in **hostel** sounds like "ah," like in the word "hot."

house / home

A **house** is a specific type of building. It is different from an apartment. A house is a physical thing – we can talk about a big house, a small house, a blue house, etc. You can also talk about doing work on your house – painting your house, remodeling your house, building a house, and so on.

The word **home** is more of an emotional idea – it means the place where you live, and where you have a special emotional attachment – where you feel comfortable, safe, and happy. Your "home" can be a house, an apartment, or any other place or type of structure.

We usually use “home” when describing your location:

- I was **at home** last night.
- ~~I was **in my house** last night.~~

We also tend to use “home” with the verbs **go** and **get:**

- Bye everyone. I’m **going home**.
- What time do you normally **get home** from work?

Another informal word for "home" is **place** (as in "a place to live"):

- Let's drop by Cathy's **place** on our way to the store.
- I'm staying at my cousin's **place** while I look for my own apartment.
- Bob and Anna invited us over to their **place** for dinner.

There's also a difference between **housework** and **homework.** The academic tasks from school that you need to do at home are called **homework.** The cleaning, organizing, and maintenance tasks that you need to do around your house are **housework** (sweeping the floor, washing the dishes, doing laundry, etc.)

how about…? / what about…?

Use **"How about?"** to suggest an action and to "open" possibilities:

- "I've got the day off from work tomorrow. What should we do?"
- "**How about spending** the day in the city?"
- "Nah. I don't really feel like traveling."
- "**How about we clean** the house?"
- "No way. I want to do something fun."
- "OK. **How about doing** some shopping and then seeing a movie?"
- "Hmm… that sounds good!"

In this conversation, "How about…?" is used to suggest various possibilities of actions. "How about…" can be followed by the -ing form of the verb OR by a subject and verb ("How about we clean…")

Use **"What about?"** to mention an objection or a potential problem:

- "Let's spend the weekend in the city!"
- "But **what about** my guitar lesson on Saturday?"
- "That's no problem, just talk with the teacher and reschedule it."
- "And **what about** the English test on Monday? I haven't studied yet."
- "You can study on Sunday night when we get back."

In this conversation, **"What about…"** is used to express a negative point or a potential problem with the plan or idea. After "What about…" we use a noun ("my guitar lesson" and "the English test")

When asking the same question back to the person who asked it, **"How about you?"** and **"What about you?"** are both correct!

- "How have you been?"
  "Good – a little busy with school. **How about you?**"
- "Where do you work?"
  "At the local university. **What about you?**"

human / humankind / human being / man / mankind

Sometimes the word **man** or **mankind** is used when referring to all human beings (both male and female):

- Throughout history, **man** has worshipped gods or spirits.
- The universe will never be completely understood by **mankind.**

However, some people consider this sexist, so it is better to use **humans** or **humankind:**

- Throughout history, **humankind** has worshipped gods or spirits.
- The universe will never be completely understood by **humankind.**
- **Humans** first migrated to the Americas 15,000 years ago.
- This spider's venom is deadly to insects, but harmless to **human beings.**

Humans and **human beings** use the *plural* form of the verb, but **humankind** uses the *singular* form of the verb:

- humankind **has** worshipped gods
- humans **have** worshipped gods

We often use **humans** or **humankind** when making broad statements about humanity in general. **Human beings** is often used when contrasting humans with animals, or when encouraging people to treat each other "like human beings" (meaning with respect and fairness).

hundred / hundreds

Use **hundred** when there is a specific number, and use **hundreds** when you don't know or can't count how many. This rule also applies to thousand/thousands and million/millions.

- This skeleton is **thousands** of years old.
- This skeleton is **three thousand** years old.

When saying numbers, always use the *singular form:*

- **250 = Two hundred and fifty**
  ~~Two hundreds and fifty~~
- **7,812 = Seven thousand, eight hundred and twelve**
  ~~Seven thousands, eight hundreds and twelve~~
- **$10,000,000 = Ten million dollars**
  ~~Ten millions of dollars~~

I / my / me / mine / myself

I is the **subject** – the person who *does* the action in the sentence.

- **I** gave John the book.

Me is the **object** – the person who *receives* the action in the sentence.

- John gave **me** the book.
  OR: John gave the book to **me.**

Most people get confused when there are multiple subjects or objects in the sentence, but the rule is still true:

- Dana and **I** saw Jim at the party.
  Dana = subject
  I = subject
  Jim = object

- The teacher called Sarah and **me.**
  The teacher = subject
  Sarah = object
  me = object

My and **mine** show possession. Use **my** before the word, and use **mine** after the word:

- Paul is **my** friend.
- Paul is a friend of **mine.**
- Those are **my** glasses.
- Those glasses are **mine.**

The word **myself** is used in two cases:

1. As a **reflexive pronoun** - when "I" is both the **subject AND the object**
   - **I** gave **myself** a haircut.
     *(This means **I** cut **MY** own hair)*
     ~~**I** gave **me** a haircut.~~
   - **I** accidentally cut **myself** with the scissors.
2. For **emphasis** - when you want to emphasize the "I"
   - **I** baked this cake **myself!**
     *(I want to emphasize that **I** made it, and not another person)*
   - I know John was at the party because **I** saw him there **myself.**
     (I saw John at the party with my own eyes)
   - Give me the letter – **I'll** deliver it **myself.**
     (I'll deliver the letter personally)

Finally, the expression **by myself** means **alone:**

- I went out to dinner **by myself.**

If I was… / If I were…

Which is correct?

- If **I were** you, I'd apologize.
- If **I was** you, I'd apologize.

The first one is correct – **If I were you** – because this is a **hypothetical (imaginary)** situation. It is not possible for me to be you, but I am imagining that this is the case.

Here are more examples of imaginary situations using "were" instead of "was":

- If **he were** in better shape, he could run a marathon.
  (the reality is that he is NOT in good shape, and he could NOT run a marathon)
- My mother would definitely disapprove if **she were** here right now.
  (the reality is that she is NOT here, so she does not have the opportunity to disapprove)

If the situation is not imaginary – if there was a possibility that it really occurred in the past – then we can use **was:**

- I'm sorry if I **was** rude.
  (= it's possible that I was rude)
- If he **was** drunk, then he should have called a taxi to drive him home.
  (= it's possible that he was drunk)
- I don't know if **she was** at the party; I wasn't there.
  (= it's possible that she was at the party)

However, in casual spoken English, many native speakers are starting to use **was** even in imaginary situations, for example:

- My sister is a teacher. She would make more money if she **was** a lawyer.

Technically, it should be "if she **were** a lawyer," but the incorrect use is becoming more and more common.

if / whether

You can use **whether** or **if** interchangeably in indirect questions. "If" is more informal and more common in spoken English. "Whether" is more formal and should be used in formal writing.

- Do you know **if/whether** he has a girlfriend?
- Could you tell me **if/whether** the supermarket is open on Sundays?
- I was wondering **if/whether** you'd like to join me for lunch.

There are some cases where we MUST use **whether:**

- Before infinitives (to + verb)
  I don't know **whether to tell** him or not.
  *= I don't know **if I should tell** him or not.*
  She's trying to decide **whether to travel** or continue her studies.
  = She's trying to decide **if she should travel** or continue her studies.
- After prepositions (about, on, over, etc.)
  We're thinking about **whether** we'd rather go out or stay in tonight.
  It depends on **whether** it'll be rainy or sunny.

Always use **if** to introduce a condition, in a conditional sentence:

- My boss gets mad **if** I'm late for work.
  (Condition = I'm late for work. Result = my boss gets mad)
- **If** you drive me to the airport, I'll give you $15 for gas.
  (Condition = you drive me to the airport. Result = I'll give you $15)
- I'd surf every day **if** I lived near the beach.
  (Condition = living near the beach. Result = surfing every day)
- **If** we'd left home earlier, we wouldn't have missed our flight.
  (Condition = leaving home earlier. Result = not missing the flight)

ignore / neglect

If you **ignore** someone/something, it means you don't pay attention to it:

- The president **ignored** the criticism and continued with his plan.

- My best friend has been **ignoring** me ever since we had a fight - she hasn't been answering my calls.
- Ralph drives way too fast; he totally **ignores** the speed limit.

Ignoring can be good or bad. It is bad to **ignore** the speed limit while driving; but it is good to ignore noisy and annoying people.

The word **neglect** means to fail to give attention or care to something that you really SHOULD care for:

- If parents purposefully do not give food to their children, they are **neglecting** the children.
- If you don't brush your teeth or take showers, you are **neglecting** your health/appearance.

Neglecting is usually a bad thing, because you are failing to do something that is a necessary responsibility.

We can also say someone **neglected to do** something – again, not doing something that you *should* do:

- The accident occurred after he **neglected to check** the safety controls.
- She **neglected to go** to the doctor, and her health problem got even worse.

ill / sick

Sick is the less formal word, and it usually describes a more temporary health problem – often nausea, although not always.

- If you're feeling **sick,** you might need to vomit.
- If you get the flu, you might be **sick** for two weeks.
- If a child is **sick,** he stays home from school that day.
- Taking a day off from work for health reasons is called "taking a **sick day**."

Ill is the more formal word, and it usually describes a more serious, more permanent health problem, like cancer.

- My uncle has been **ill** for the past five years.

- She passed away *(=died)* after a long **illness.**
- Someone with a mental health problem is **mentally ill.**
- A disease that will definitely result in death is a **terminal illness.**

impending / pending

If an issue is **pending,** it means it is not yet concluded or resolved. It is waiting for a decision or confirmation.

- The results of the experiment are **pending.**
  = waiting for the results to be finalized
- We have a few **pending** issues on which we need the CEO's input.
  = waiting for the CEO to give his/her opinion
- The cause of death is **pending** investigation.
  = waiting for the police to investigate
- There are two **pending** transactions in the bank account.
  = the transactions have been initiated, but have not yet finished

An **impending** event is one that will happen very soon. Impending often has a negative connotation (though not always):

- The weather forecasters are advising people to stay home due to the **impending** storm.
- The soldiers prepared themselves for the **impending** battle.
- She faced her **impending** death with peace and tranquility.
- My father is wrapping up his projects at work, in preparation for his **impending** retirement. *(not a negative connotation; simply means that he will retire very soon)*

For more positive events that will happen soon, we can use the word **upcoming** – "I'm looking forward to my upcoming trip!"

imply / infer

To **imply** something means to suggest it in an indirect way, without saying it directly.

- Larry's remarks **implied** that he'd be leaving the company soon.
- The evidence seems to **imply** that the suspect is innocent of the crime.

To **infer** something is to form a conclusion from the information available (especially if the information available does not state things directly):

- From Larry's remarks, I **inferred** that he'd probably be leaving the company soon.
- Based on the evidence, the judge **inferred** that the suspect was innocent.

These two words describe the same event but from the two different sides (similar to lend and borrow). The speaker or writer **implies** a point (suggests it indirectly). The reader or listener **infers** a point (comes to their own conclusion after considering the indirect information).

in / into / inside / within

In and **inside** are the same in many cases. You can say:

- We are **in** the house.
  = We are **inside** the house.
- The clothes are **in** the closet.
  = The clothes are **inside** the closet.

The word **inside** implies that the thing is physically enclosed - it is in a container (a box, a vehicle, a building with walls, etc.)

This means that when talking about location, time, being included, or other situations where you are *not* physically surrounded, you should use **in,** not **inside:**

- I live **in** Australia.
- My birthday is **in** July.
- He plays guitar **in** a band.

The word **into** implies movement or transformation:

- She jumped **into** the swimming pool.
- We went **into** the house.
- The car crashed **into** a telephone pole.
- The caterpillar turned **into** a butterfly.

With the verbs put, throw, drop, and fall, you can use either into or in:

- He **put** the card **into/in** his pocket.
- I **threw** the paper cup **into/in** the trash.
- She lost her balance and **fell into/in** the river.

The word **within** means "inside the limits" – and in this case the limits are non-physical. They can be limits of time or distance, or an area of understanding:

- The results will be delivered **within fourteen days**.
- Most car accidents occur **within five miles** of home.

We also have some expressions using **within**:

- **within earshot** = at a distance where you are able to hear something (such as a conversation)
- **within reason** = to the degree that good judgment would allow
- **within reach / within one's grasp** = able to be taken with your hand, or able to be accomplished

You can also use **within** to describe a person's inner feelings (in this case, you can also use "inside"):

- He tried to hide the anger burning **within/inside** him.

in / on / at

	TIME	PLACE
IN	**Months** • In January • In October **Seasons** • In the summer • In the spring **Years** • In 2004 • In 1986 **Periods of the day** • In the morning • In the evening (exception: *at night*)	**Cities and countries** • In Tokyo • In Japan **Rooms and buildings** • In the kitchen • In the supermarket **Closed spaces** • In the car • In a park

	TIME	PLACE
ON	**Dates and days** • On Monday • On February 14th	**Transportation** • On the bus • On a bike (exception: *in a car*)

		A surface • On the table • On the wall

	TIME	PLACE
AT	**Times** • At 6:00 • At half past three • At noon	**Contexts** • At school • At work • At a party

in time / on time

On time means that there is a specific time established when something is supposed/expected to happen, and it is happening at the planned time.

- My job interview is scheduled for 4:00 PM.
  If I arrive at 4:00 PM, I am **on time** for the interview.
- The flight is scheduled to leave at 10:30 AM.
  If it leaves at 10:30 AM, the flight is leaving **on time.**
- The class is supposed to start at 9:00.
  If it does start at 9:00 with no delays, it is starting **on time.**

If you say **"He's always on time"** it means he is punctual; he always arrives at the correct time, he is not late.

If you say **"He's never on time"** it means he is always late.

In time means that something happened at the last moment before it was too late; before something bad would happen.

- The accident victim was seriously injured; they got him to the hospital just **in time.** *(If they hadn't arrived at the hospital, he might have died)*
- I missed the opportunity to go to that college because I didn't submit my application **in time.**
- I left home early and arrived **in** plenty of **time** to catch my flight.
- I got stuck in traffic and arrived **just in time** to catch my flight.

We often say "just in time" to emphasize that something happened immediately before the limit/deadline, as you can see by comparing the last two example sentences.

There's also the expression **"in the nick of time"** which even further emphasizes something happening at the last moment, immediately before the limit/deadline:

- The teacher said we had to turn our assignments in by 4:00 PM. I e-mailed her my paper at 3:58 - **in the nick of time!**
- In movies, a specialist often disarms a bomb **in the nick of time,** with just a few seconds left on the countdown before the bomb would have exploded.

incite / insight

Insight (pronounced IN – site) is a noun that means an in-depth understanding:

- The biography offered many **insights** into the life of a famous artist.
- The research will provide **insight** into the development of the brain.
- She has lived in Mongolia for 30 years, and has valuable **insight** into the local culture.

Incite (pronounced in – SITE) is a verb that means to provoke to action. It is often used for provoking violent actions such as hatred, riots, and rebellion.

- The community leader's angry words **incited** a riot.
- Social media is sometimes used to **incite** hatred of religious minorities.

income / salary / wage

The money you receive for doing your job is your **salary.** A salary is usually the *same amount every month*; it doesn't change based on the exact number of hours you work.

A **wage** is when you receive money based on the number of hours you work: If you work 1 hour, you get a certain amount; if you work 4 hours, you get 4 times that amount. Also, the minimum amount of money (either hourly or monthly) that employers MUST pay their employees by law is called the **minimum wage.**

Your **income** refers to ALL the money you receive. It includes your salary or wage, but may also include money received from investments. If you have a house or apartment which you rent to other people to receive money, that money is also part of your income (but it is not a salary or wage, because it doesn't come from a job).

Indian / indigenous / Native American

The word **Indian** is for people from the country of India. The word **indigenous** is used to describe native peoples of the land who lived there before the arrival of colonizers.

However, some people use "Indian" for indigenous people. It is not correct, but people do it anyway - this is because the earliest European colonizers of the Americas mistakenly called the native people "Indians."

Members of the indigenous peoples of the United States can be called **Native Americans.**

You can read more about the history of names for native peoples here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_American_name_controversy

inhabit / live / reside

Live is the most common word:

- My family **lives** in a big house.
- They **live** on the East Coast.
- I've **lived** in Canada my whole life.
- We've been **living** here for five years.

Reside is a more formal word for live. It usually implies that you live in a place permanently or for a long time. In legal language, the place where you live is called your **residence.**

- He **resides** with his elderly mother.
- She grew up in London, but now **resides** in Frankfurt.

The word **inhabit** is usually used for population groups (not individual people) living in a particular area, and it is often used in the passive voice:

- The desert **is inhabited** by nomadic tribes.
- That village **is mostly inhabited** by fishermen.

If an area has no people living in it, then you can describe it as **uninhabited**.

intend / tend

If you **intend** to do something, it means you plan to do it. You have the desire or idea to do it in your mind, but the action has not been performed yet. For example:

- I **intend** to go to grad school next year.
- The Olympic athlete **intends** to become a coach after retiring from competition.

Something you **intend** to do is still in the future or in your thoughts. But something you **tend** to do is in the present and past – it is a real action. If you **tend** to do something, it means you generally or typically do it.

- I **tend** to be the first one to arrive at the office in the morning.
  (= I typically arrive first)
- Children **tend** to prefer sweets to vegetables.

(= children usually want to eat sweets, not vegetables)

- The summers **tend** to be rainy in this part of the country.
  (= it generally rains in the summer)

You can only use **intend** with planned ACTIONS, but you can use **tend** with actions or with thoughts, beliefs, preferences, or states of being:

- I **tend** to like comedy movies better than action movies.
- I **intend** to see the new romantic comedy.
- He **tends** to be shy in social situations.
- He **intends** to take public speaking classes to improve his confidence.

interested / interesting

In general, with adjectives that have both **–ing** and **–ed** forms, use the –ed form to describe **how you feel** and the –ing form to describe **the thing/person/event that causes the feeling:**

- I'm **interested** in art. I think art is **interesting.**
  ~~I'm **interesting** in art.~~
- I'm **bored.** This movie is **boring.**

Here are other pairs of adjectives that follow this pattern:

- I'm **tired.** My job is very **tiring.**
- I'm **excited!** This soccer game is really **exciting!**
- I'm **frustrated.** The problems in my life are so **frustrating.**
- I'm **surprised.** This situation is quite **surprising.**
- I'm **confused.** The book I'm reading is **confusing.**

When talking about people, the –ed form describes a **temporary** state of feeling, but the –ing form describes a more **permanent** characteristic of someone's personality:

- He's **bored.** = He feels bored right now.
- He's **boring.** = He is a boring person in general. Other people feel bored when they are with him.

interfere / intervene

Interfere has a negative connotation; it is when someone/something affects a situation, and you don't want it to:

- I wish my mother would stop **interfering** in my life!
- I'm trying to study, but the noise is **interfering** with my ability to concentrate.

Intervene has a more positive connotation; it is when someone/something affects a situation in a good way. We often use it for stepping into a conflict or argument to prevent it from getting worse.

- Bob and Joe were about to start fighting, but Pam **intervened** and calmed them down.
- The diplomats **intervened** in the conflict and negotiated a peace agreement between the two countries.

The same is true for the noun forms: **interference** and **intervention.**

- The citizens are angry about the government's **interference** in the economy; there are so many rules and regulations that it harms businesses.
  (interference = negative connotation)
- The citizens are happy about the government's **intervention** in the economy; the new laws and incentives have saved the country from a crisis.
  (intervention = positive connotation)

its / it's

It's is an abbreviation for **it is,** and **its** is a possessive:

- **It's** raining.
  = it is raining

- The dog ate **its** food.
  = *the food belongs to the dog*

There is no pronunciation difference, but confusing **it's** and **its** is a very common mistake in written English!

job / work / career

A **job** is a regular and official activity that you do, and receive money for your activity. It is also called a **profession** or an **occupation.** You can have a **full-time job** (40 hours a week) or a **part-time job** (around 25 hours a week).

The word **job** is a **countable noun:**

- Right after graduating from college, I worked **two jobs** so that I could pay off my student loans faster.
- Terry has had **seven jobs** in the past five years.

The word **work** is more general than "job" – whereas "job" is a specific occupation/profession, "work" refers to **general efforts and activities** done to accomplish a goal. "Work" can be done both *inside* an official job and *outside* a job!

The word **work** also refers to **the context of your place of employment -** so we can say:

- "I **start work** at 7 AM."
  ~~"I start my job at 7 AM"~~
- "I **finish / leave work** at 4:30."
  ~~"I finish my job at 4:30"~~
  - *An informal way to say "leave work" is "**get off work**"*
- "We **go to work** by car."
  ~~"We go to our job by car"~~
- "I went to the bar with some **friends from work."**
- "I can't access Facebook when I'm **at work."** (not "at my job")

"Work" is an **uncountable noun,** so it cannot be plural:

- ~~I have **three works** to do this week.~~
- I have **three projects** to do this week.
- I have **three things / tasks** to do this week.

Your **career** is the total progression of your professional life. It can include many different jobs over the years. You can have a **career in** (a field) – for example, a career in politics / journalism / teaching / finance.

just / only

The word "just" has several possible definitions:

1) Recently

- Be careful – I **just washed** the floor, and it's still wet.
  (= I washed the floor a few minutes ago)
- He **just finished** a big project.
  (= he finished the project very recently)

2) Only

- I have **just one** brother.
  (= I have only one brother)
- I thought you were hungry, but you ate **just half** of your sandwich.
  (= you ate only half of your sandwich, and no more)

The word **only** can be replaced with "just" in most situations:

- **Only** two students came to class on the day before Christmas.
  = **Just** two students came to class on the day before Christmas.
- My kids **only** use the internet for schoolwork, not for playing games.
  = My kids **just** use the internet for schoolwork, not for playing games.

In the expression **"If only…"** you can use "just" if you change the structure a little bit:

- **If only I had** studied harder. I would've passed the test.
  = If I had just studied harder, I would've passed the test.

"Only" and "just" are interchangeable with definition 2 of "just," but not with definition 1.

- **Definition 2 – Same meaning**
  We have **just** one daughter.
  = We have **only** one daughter.
- **Definition 1 – Different meanings**
  I **just** washed the floor (a few minutes ago)
  I **only** washed the floor (and I didn't wash the table or anything else)

Whether "just" means "recently" or "only" depends on the context:

- "Did you clean the whole house?"
  "No, I **just** washed the floor."
  (= I only washed the floor).
- "Why is the floor wet?"
  "Because I **just** washed it."
  (= I recently washed it. In this case, you can't use "only")

When you use "just" with a verb, the word order matters:

- I **just ate** two pieces of pizza.
  (= I *recently* ate two pieces of pizza)
- I **ate just** two pieces of pizza.
  (= I ate *only* two pieces, not 3 or 4 or 5)
- I **just bought** a new book.
  (= I *recently* bought a new book)
- I **bought just** one new book.
  (= I bought *only* one new book, not two or more)

kinds / types / sorts

When talking about different varieties of things, **kinds, types,** and **sorts** are essentially the same:

- I like many different **types of** music.
- All **sorts of** people come to this club – students, professionals, artists…
- This restaurant has fifty different **kinds of** sushi.

When asking questions, we usually use the singular form:

- What **type of** music do you like?
- What **sort of** people come to this club?
- What **kind of** sushi is your favorite?

"Type" is the most formal, and it implies more definite categories:

- What **type of** car is that?
  (Answer = A definite type: It's a Volkswagen / BMW / Ferrari / Toyota / etc.)
- What **kind/sort** of women do you like to date?
  (Answer = More general and descriptive: I like smart women with a good sense of humor / I tend to be attracted to tall blonde women / etc.…)

We can also use "kind of" and "sort of" in ***informal English*** to mean "a little bit." They are usually pronounced *kinda* and *sorta:*

- A cup of coffee here is $2.50. That's **kinda** expensive… at the café near my house, it's $1.50.
- I'm **sorta** hoping the party is canceled this weekend. I'm not really excited about going.

know / meet

Meet has two meanings:

- When you have first contact with a person:
  "I **met** him last year." (NOT "I **knew** him last year.")

- When you will encounter someone you already know. In this case, we often use "meet with" or "meet up with":
  "I'm **meeting up with** some friends at the bar after work."

Know has two different meanings/uses:

- With knowledge and skills in general:
  "He **knows** everything about computers."
- With knowing people in general:
  "Do you **know** Janet? She's in the advanced English class."
  "No, I don't think I **know** her."

last / latest

Both **last** and **latest** can be used to mean the "most recent":

- Did you read the **last** issue of the magazine?
- Did you read the **latest** issue of the magazine?
- My **last** post on the blog got a lot of comments.
- My **latest** post on the blog got a lot of comments.
- I saw her **last** Wednesday. *(= the most recent Wednesday. We do not usually use latest with days, weeks, months, or years)*

Latest has *only* this meaning of "most recent," but **last** can also mean "final":

- This is the author's **latest** book.
  = it is the most recent book; the author will probably write more.
- This is the **last** book in the series.
  = it is the *final* book; there will be no more books in this series.

last / past

In some situations, you can use **last** and **past** interchangeably with no difference in meaning:

- The economy has improved in the **past** month.
- The economy has improved in the **last** month.

When used with time, the word **past** always requires **the** or **this** - but the word **last** does not.

- **Last weekend** I went to the beach.
- **This past weekend** I went to the beach.
  ~~Past weekend I went to the beach.~~
- I started a new job **last year.**
  ~~I started a new job past year.~~
- I've been very busy **the last few days.**
  = I've been very busy **the past few days.**
- The company has hired several new people **in the past month.**
  = The company has hired several new people **in the last month.**

There is also a difference between "last year" and "in the last/past year."

- If it is September of 2014…
  - "last year" means the year 2013 (January – December)
  - "in the last/past year" means "in the most recent 12 months up to now: (September 2013 – September 2014).

late / lately

Late can be an adjective or an adverb that means **after the correct time.**

- I'm not hungry because I had a **late lunch.** (adjective)
- He **slept late** and missed his first class. (adverb)

Lately is an adverb that means the same as **recently.**

- I haven't studied a lot **lately.** Work has been busy for the past couple weeks.
- Have you read any good books **lately?**
- I've been thinking about you **lately.**

lay / lie

This is the technical difference between **lay** and **lie:**

You **lay an object** onto a surface.

- Could you **lay** those mats on the floor, please?
- She **laid** the books on the table.
- The workers are **laying** the carpet in the new building.

Again, you **lay an object** onto a surface. But a person/thing **lies** (itself) on the surface:

- There was a package **lying** on my doorstep.
- The clothes are **lying** all over the floor.

For a person, to **lie + a preposition of place** means to put yourself horizontally on a surface:

- I'm feeling sick. I need to **lie down.**
- **She's lying on a towel** on the beach.

Now... to complicate matters - the past tense of lie is lay!

Present	**Continuous**	**Past**	**Past Participle**
LAY	LAYING	LAID	LAID
LIE	LYING	LAY	LAIN

Also, native English speakers often say "I need to **lay down**" and "**She's laying on a towel** on the beach." – even though it's incorrect!

To summarize:

- You **lay an object** on a surface.
  We laid the flowers on the grave.
- You **lie (yourself)** on a surface.
  He's just lying there on the couch watching TV.

- An object **lies** on a surface.
  There was an abandoned bicycle lying on the sidewalk.

This lesson refers to the meaning of "lie" as an object lying on a surface. There's another meaning for "lie": to say something that isn't true. In this case, the past and past participle would be **lied** and **lied:**

- The little boy ate the cookies, then **lied** and said his sister had eaten them.
- I trust her completely; she has never **lied** to me.

like / as

We use **as** to talk about a job or function:

- I worked **as** an executive assistant for ten years. *(job)*
- He used a pair of scissors **as** a weapon to defend himself from the attacker. *(function)*

We use **like** to make a comparison:

- That cloud looks **like** a dragon.
- She sings **like** an angel.

One difference is that **as** is used when something *truly* has that job or function, and **like** is used when something is *similar,* but not *really* the other thing. Compare:

- Brad Pitt works **as** an actor.
  (Brad Pitt is really and truly an actor)
- John looks **like** Brad Pitt.
  (John is not really Brad Pitt, but he has a similar appearance)

We can also use **as if** to talk about something that is similar (but not really the case):

- When I'm skiing, I feel **like** I'm flying.
- When I'm skiing, I feel **as if** I'm flying.
- Barbara acts **like** she's superior to everyone else.

- Barbara acts **as if** she's superior to everyone else.

We can use both **such as** (more formal) and **like** (more informal) to introduce an example:

- I prefer science fiction movies, **such as** *Star Wars.*
- I prefer science fiction movies, **like** *Star Wars.*

little / small

Small is only used for physical size (a big apartment / a small apartment).

Little can be used for:

- **Size** (The cake is decorated with little flowers.)
- **Amount** (Can I have a little milk for my coffee?)
- **Degree** (I'm a little nervous.)
- **Size with an emotional expression**.
  This emotional expression can be:
  - **Adoration:** Look at that cute **little** dog!
  - **Sympathy:** That poor **little** girl has no mother or father.
  - **Dislike:** I don't want to go to her stupid **little** party.

look / see / watch

These are all actions you do with your eyes, but there are some small differences in the ways we use each word:

Look is to direct your attention towards something. "Look" is intentional, and it is often used in the form: **look + at + (object)**

- **Look at** the sunset – it's so beautiful!
- I was **looking at** all the books, trying to decide which one to buy.

See is to perceive with your eyes, but it is usually not intentional (you don't "try" to see, it just happens):

- I **saw** a car accident while driving home from work.

Watch is to keep your eyes on something (usually something that is moving) for a long time. It is intentional.

- I'm **watching** TV.
- I **watched** the baseball game.

There are a few details with movies, concerts, etc. We usually say **"Have you seen…?"** when asking a question about if someone has watched a certain film:

- **Have you seen** the new James Bond movie?
  - Yeah, I **saw** it yesterday!
  - No, I haven't **seen** it yet.

Also, we usually use **see** when going to a movie or show in a theater or public place, and **watch** when doing it at home:

- Let's go **see** a movie at the theater.
- Let's **watch** a movie on my laptop.
- I **saw** Adele live in concert last month.
- I **watched** Adele's performance on TV.

lose / loose

Lose is a verb; it is the opposite of "win" and also the opposite of "find."

- The baseball team is **losing** 5-2.
- I **lost** my favorite hat. I can't find it anywhere!

Loose is an adjective, it is the opposite of "tight."

- These pants are too **loose** - I'll need to wear a belt.
- My seven-year-old daughter has a **loose** tooth; it will probably fall out soon.

In **lose,** the "s" sounds like a "z." In **loose,** the "s" sounds like an "s."

lose / miss

Use **lose** with objects (when you don't know where they are) or with sports games (the opposite of "win"):

- I've **lost** my calculator. Can I borrow yours?
- My favorite soccer team **lost** 3-0 in the semifinal.

When YOU don't know where you are, you **are lost** or have **gotten lost:**

- I took the wrong train and **got lost** in the city center.
- Whenever I**'m lost,** I ask someone for directions.

Use **miss** when you are late and you don't get some transportation (flights, trains, buses, etc.) or when you don't experience an event or opportunity:

- I got to the airport late and **missed my flight.**
  ~~lost my flight~~
- You **missed** a great class yesterday!
  ~~lost a great class~~

We also use **miss** to talk about feeling sad when we don't see someone, or feeling sad because of a thing or experience we don't have anymore:

- My brother moved to Australia last year. I really **miss** him!
- I'm glad I moved to my own place, but I do **miss** my mom's delicious cooking.
- I **miss** playing volleyball – I used to play a lot when I was a teenager, and now I rarely have the chance.

made of / made from

Use **made of** to talk about the material of an object – wood, plastic, glass, crystal, etc. – which has not gone through very much processing. You can still see the original material:

- This table is **made of** wood.
- The window is **made of** glass.
- This shirt is **made of** cotton.

Use **made from** to talk about one object that came from another, different object:

- This purse is **made from** recycled plastic bags.
- Cheese is **made from** milk.
- Wine is **made from** grapes.

In each of these cases, you *can't* see the original materials anymore (plastic bags, milk, or grapes); they have been transformed into something completely new.

marriage / married / wedding

The **wedding** is the official ceremony/party. (The party is usually called the "reception"):

- I'm going to my cousin's **wedding** on October 7.
- We want to have a band at our **wedding** reception.
- The **wedding** will be at the church, and the reception will be at a restaurant.

The **marriage** is the relationship in general, or the institution in society:

- My parents have a strong **marriage.** They've been together for 35 years.
- New York has just legalized gay **marriage.**
- Over 40% of **marriages** end in divorce.

The word **married** describes the status of a person. Use **married to** (not "married with") when you describe the person's husband/wife:

- My sister isn't **married.** She's single.
- I've been **married** for 5 years.
- He's **married to** a woman from another country.
- She's **married to** a successful businessman.

We use **marry** or **get married** for the action of formalizing the marriage:

- He **married** a woman he'd known since high school. They finally **got married** after dating for ten years.
- She's going to **marry** a famous actor. They're **getting married** next month.

may / might

The difference between **may** and **might** is very small:

Use **may** when the event is slightly more likely to happen:

- "What are you doing this weekend?"
  "Shopping! I'm going to buy some new clothes, and I **may** get a new hat as well." *(it's slightly more probable that I will buy the hat)*
- "What are you doing this weekend?"
  "I **might** go to the movies. I'm not sure."
  (it's slightly less probable that I will go to the movies)

However, in this simple case, the words really are interchangeable; you can use either one.

When making guesses about something that happened in the past, we usually use **might + have + past participle**.

- "Why is Sheila so happy today?"
  "I don't know. She **might have gotten** a promotion – I'd heard a rumor that the boss was thinking of making her a manager."

When asking permission, use **may** (or can/could):

- "**May** I open the window?"
  This question is correct, but it sounds rather formal. Most English speakers would probably say "Can I open the window?" or "Could I open the window?"

May not means "no permission"; **might not** means "maybe not."

- Students **may not** use cell phones during the exam.
  = using cell phones during the exam is prohibited
- I **might not** go to the wedding.
  = maybe I will go, but maybe I won't go.

moral / morale

As a noun, a **moral** is the lesson learned from a story - often used in the expression **"the moral of the story."**

The plural form, **morals,** has a different meaning. It refers to a person's standards of determining right and wrong behavior:

- The doctor refused to perform an abortion because it was against her **morals.**
- He has no **morals** whatsoever - he'll do anything and everything to get rich.

The adjective **moral** refers to things related to ethics (matters of right/wrong):

- If you know that a child is being abused, you have a **moral** obligation to inform the police.
- It is often used with **moral** obligation/responsibility/duty

The noun **morale** is completely different!

First of all, there is a pronunciation difference:

- **moral:** MOR - al
- **morale:** mor - ALE

Morale means the state of spirit/emotions of a group of people - their general confidence and cheerfulness.

- If a sports team has high **morale,** it means the members of the team are feeling good and optimistic.

- If **morale** is low among employees of a company, it means the employees are feeling negative and not motivated.

Mr. / Mrs. / Ms. / Miss

These titles indicate a person's gender and marital status:

- **Mr.** (pronounced "mister") = a man. Can be married or unmarried.
- **Mrs.** (pronounced "missus") = a married woman
- **Miss** (pronounced "miss") = an unmarried woman
- **Ms.** (pronounced "mizz") = a woman who we are not sure if she is married or not.

These titles are typically used with the last name:

- Bob Jones = **Mr. Jones**
- Susan Smith (married) = **Mrs. Smith**
- Kate Windsor (not married) = **Miss Windsor**
- Linda McDonnell (marital status unknown) = **Ms. McDonnell**

music / song

Use **music** when talking about music in general, or a type/category of music:

- My neighbors are playing loud **music;** it's really annoying!
- I'm not a fan of country **music.**
- The performers are dancing to classical **music.**

Use **song** when talking about one specific piece of music:

- I love the **song** "Imagine" by John Lennon.
- I like two or three of the **songs** on this CD, but the rest aren't that great. ~~the **musics** on this CD~~
- This is the #1 love **song** of the summer.

nausea / nauseous / queasy

Technically, the words **nauseous** and **nauseating** describe something that *makes* you feel sick, and the words **nauseated** and **queasy** describe the way you feel – like your stomach is uncomfortable and you might vomit:

- A **nauseous** smell of rotten fruit came from the garbage bags.
- That scene in the movie is **nauseating;** I wish they didn't show such graphic violence.
- I felt **nauseated** every morning during the first few months of pregnancy.
- My son was a little **queasy** during the boat ride.

However, today many people say "I feel nauseous" – so this use of nauseous to mean the feeling is becoming more acceptable. Nauseating is still used to describe the thing causing the feeling.

Nausea is the noun form (the other words are adjectives). It is often used when describing symptoms:

- Possible side effects of this medication include fatigue, **nausea,** and headaches.
- He was hospitalized with severe **nausea** and an elevated body temperature.

north / northern

In general, we use **northern, southern, eastern,** and **western** to talk about more general, indefinite areas – and **north, south, east,** and **west** in official names of places:

Official names of places:

- **North** America
- **South** Africa
- **East** Timor
- **West** Virginia

General areas:

- **northern** England
- **southern** India
- **eastern** Australia
- **western** Europe
- the **northern** border of the country
- the **southern** side of the house
- the **eastern** coastline
  (although in the U.S. we say "east coast" and "west coast")
- the **western** part of the state

One exception – an example of an "official name" that uses northern and southern – is saying the **Northern/Southern Hemisphere** to refer to the two halves of the earth divided by the equator.

notable / noticeable

Something that is **noticeable** means that it is easy to be seen or observed:

- He has a **noticeable** accent – he must not be a native English speaker.
- The new medicine resulted in a **noticeable** improvement in her health.
- The differences between the old software and the new software are barely **noticeable.**

Something that is **notable** means that it is worthy of comment; it calls your attention and is important enough to talk about:

- Clara made several **notable** contributions to the field of sociology.
- One especially **notable** feature of the software is its ability to be customized.
- The "around the world in 60 seconds" program quickly describes **notable** events in the international news.

If you describe a person as **notable,** it means they are distinguished and prominent:

- He is a **notable** young artist; his work has won several awards.
- A few **notable** citizens announced their support of the governor's campaign.

ocean / sea / lake / pond

Technically, there is a difference between an **ocean** and a **sea.** An **ocean** is an extremely large body of salt water, and a **sea** is partially surrounded by land.

There are only five oceans: the Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean, Arctic Ocean, and Antarctic Ocean. There are more than 50 **seas,** including the Mediterranean Sea, the Baltic Sea, Caribbean Sea, and South China Sea.

Most seas are connected to the ocean, although there are a few that are completely surrounded by land, like the Aral Sea, Caspian Sea, and Dead Sea.

However, when talking about salt water in general, many people use **ocean** and **sea** interchangeably.

A **lake** is an area of *fresh water* (not salty) that is completely surrounded by land. A **pond** is the same as a lake, only smaller.

of / from

OF is used for **POSSESSION –** Who does it belong to?

- A friend **of** mine
  (=my friend)
- The president **of** the company
  (=the company's president)
- The color **of** that car
  (=that car's color)

FROM is used for **ORIGIN –** Where did it come from?

- I'm **from** the United States.
- This T-shirt is **from** Mexico.
- I got this book **from** the bookstore.
  (It is now MY book, but its origin was the bookstore)

oppress / suppress / repress

The verb **oppress** means to keep somebody down by using unjust force. For example, a cruel dictator might oppress his country's people, or the ethnic majority of a population might oppress the minority. Oppress always has a negative connotation, and oppression is usually a continuous condition and not just a one-time event.

The word **repress** can be used in two ways:

1) To put a stop to something by force.

A country's army can **repress** a revolution or revolt - stop it by fighting and winning against the revolutionaries. Politicians and governments can also **repress** opposition or dissent (disagreement) through control of the media as well as threatening people who have different opinions.

2) To hold back your feelings, or avoid revealing or acting on them.

If your boss makes an embarrassing mistake during a presentation to a client, you may have to repress your laughter (not laugh, even though you want to). The word "suppress" can also be used for this, and is probably more common.

In psychology, if feelings, memories, or desires are **repressed,** it means they are buried deep in the person's consciousness (and often cause some negative effects on thinking or behavior). For example, a man who abuses children may have repressed memories of himself being abused when he was a child.

Suppress is the most common of the three, and has the most general meaning. It can be used:

1) In the same sense as repress - to stop a rebellion, uprising, revolt, or dissent by using force. Sometimes we add the adjectives violently, brutally, or bloodily if the suppression involved fighting and killing.

2) For holding back feelings - similarly to repress, but without the psychology meaning. If one of your co-workers who is extremely lazy receives a huge promotion, you might have to suppress your surprise upon hearing the news.

We often say somebody was "unable to suppress" their emotion if they couldn't avoid showing their feelings, or "tried to suppress" their emotion if they are making an effort but having difficulty:

- She was unable to **suppress** her tears when she heard about the tragic accident.
- He tried to **suppress** his anger and deal with the problem rationally and fairly.

3) Prevent something from being revealed

A dishonest lawyer might **suppress** evidence in a criminal trial. A controlling government might **suppress** information or news that could present the government in a negative light.

One difference between oppression and suppression/repression is that a minority group can suffer oppression (from the people in power) even if they are not trying to challenge or revolt against them. Repression and suppression are only used when the people in power react against a movement of the citizens.

overtake / take over

Overtake (v.) means to catch up with something and then pass it. This can be in terms of movement/physical speed, or in terms of getting higher numbers:

- With a final burst of speed, Gary **overtook** Paul and won the race.
- The number of women in college has now **overtaken** the number of men.
- Sales of the new product will likely **overtake** sales of the old product by the end of the year. *(in these last two examples, we can also use "surpass")*

To **take over** (v.) means to take control – one country can **take over** another country with military force; when a big company buys a smaller company, it **takes over** the management of the smaller company. The verb **take over** is two words, and the noun, referring to the action of taking control, is **takeover.**

pass away / pass out

You definitely don't want to get these two phrasal verbs confused!

Pass away is an indirect way to say someone **died:**

- My grandfather **passed away** yesterday. The funeral is this weekend.
- Rachel **passed away** after a long battle with cancer.

Pass out has two meanings:

1. **To lose consciousness**
   He was so exhausted and dehydrated that he **passed out.**
   She **passed out** after drinking an entire bottle of wine.
2. **To distribute**
   The teacher **passed out** the worksheets to the students.
   There's a guy **passing out** brochures for the new café on the street corner.

pass the time / spend time

Use **spend time** to talk about the time you do an activity:

- I ~~**pass**~~ **spend a lot of time** reading.
- We ~~**passed**~~ **spent an hour** discussing the best way to finish the project.

The expression **pass the time** is different – it means doing something to make the time pass faster while you are waiting for something else:

- I look at the magazines to **pass the time** while waiting for my appointment at the dentist's office.

peak / pique

These two words are pronounced the same. To **pique** is a verb and it means to provoke or arouse.

There is an expression, **"It piqued my interest."** – this means that something attracted your interest or attention. However, some people write it incorrectly as **"It peaked my interest."**

A **peak** is a noun, it means the top of a mountain or the highest point of something.

persons / peoples

In everyday English, the plural form of **person** is **people:**

- One **person** came to the English class.
- Two **people** came to the English class.

The word **peoples** means two or more **people groups:**

- There are various indigenous **peoples** living in the Amazon.
- Many different languages are spoken among the **peoples** of Africa.

The word **persons** means "individuals" and it is really only used in very formal/official contracts or reports:

- From a police report: Security camera footage shows that four **persons** were involved in the bank robbery.

Police also look for **persons of interest** (people who may be connected with a crime) and search for **missing persons** (individuals who are missing and nobody knows where they are).

poison / venom

Both of these words describe substances that cause injury, illness, or death when they get into your body.

The difference is that **poison** gets into your body if you inhale it (breathe it in), ingest it (eat or drink), or touch it. **Venom** gets into your body if it is injected in, such as through a bite or a sting.

Certain snakes are **venomous**, because they bite you and inject their venom (although many native English speakers say "poisonous snake"). Scorpions and some spiders are also venomous, because they bite or sting you. There are plants and frogs that are **poisonous** - you will get sick if you touch them or eat them.

Sometimes people use **poison** to kill other people - by secretly putting it into their food or drink. When this happens, we say the victim **was poisoned.**

politics / policy

Politics means the world of government in general:

- The vice-president has a long career in **politics.**
- I hate discussing **politics** with my family because it always turns into an argument.

Sometimes people talk about **"office politics"** outside the context of government – this means the connections and actions that people inside a company take in order to gain power, forming relationships and manipulating situations to their advantage.

A **policy** is like a rule. Countries have policies (foreign policy, immigration policy, gun control policy) but schools and companies do, too:

- Our **policy** is that customers can return an item and get a refund within 30 days of their purchase.
- My school had strict **policies** regarding lateness – if you were late more than five times, you got suspended.

poor / pore / pour

The verb **pour** means to make liquid flow out from a container by inclining the container. When you put milk or juice from the carton into a glass, you are **pouring** it.

When it's raining very hard, you can also say **"It's pouring."**

Poor (adjective) is the opposite of rich. If a person is **poor,** they have little or no money or possessions:

- I grew up in a **poor** family; we couldn't even afford new shoes for school.

The word **poor** can also be used to describe something that is below average; does not meet satisfactory standards:

- These products are of extremely **poor** quality – they break easily.
- Attendance at the seminars was **poor;** only a dozen people showed up in a room that could seat a hundred.

Finally, **poor** can also be used to describe somebody who deserves pity:

- The **poor** guy waited at the bus stop for hours in the rain.
- You have a sore throat? You **poor** thing! Let me get you some tea.
  (the expression "you poor thing!" expresses pity for a person who is in a bad situation)

A **pore** (noun) is a very tiny opening in the skin. Sweat comes out of your skin through **pores.** Some facial cleansing soaps claim to clean out your **pores.**

We also have the expression to **pore over** something, meaning to read or study it carefully and attentively:

- He **pored over** the articles as he did research for his paper.
- She's looking for a new job; she's been **poring over** the classified ads in the newspaper every day.

pray / prey

Image source: Steve Evans

The word **pray** is a verb, and it means to talk to God or to any spirit or deity that is the object of worship:

- The mother is **praying** for her son to recover from his illness.
- The tribe **prayed** to the gods for rain.

The noun form is a **prayer** (referring to the words you say when you talk to God).

The word **prey** is a noun, meaning an animal that is hunted or caught for food. If a lion attacks and eats a zebra, the zebra is the **prey** (the lion is called a **predator**). Mice and rats are **prey** for animals like snakes and owls.

We also have the phrasal verb, to **prey on** someone/something – this means to take advantage of them in a nasty, vicious way. For example, criminals who run scams often **prey on** old people and trick them into sending the criminal their money. People who run sex trafficking businesses **prey on** young women who are looking for better job opportunities in another country.

principal / principle

A **principle** (n.) is a fundamental idea, belief, philosophy, or rule:

- My daughter is learning the basic **principles** of physics in her science class.
- Power in the hands of the people is one of the key **principles** of democracy.
- He would never steal from the company – he's a man of high **principles.**

The word **principal** has three meanings:

1. **As an adjective:** the main or most important
   The lake is the **principal** water source for the city.
2. **As a noun:** the director of an elementary, middle, or high school
   Students who misbehave are sent to the **principal's** office.

3. **As a noun (finance):** the original amount of a debt (not counting the interest - the extra money that accumulates over time as the debt is not paid):
   At a 10% interest rate, a **principal** of $1,000 will accumulate $100 of interest.

problem / trouble

The word **problem** is connected with the word "solution." There is usually some specific way to resolve a **problem**. If there's a **problem** with your computer, the computer repairman can fix it. If you have a **problem** in your relationship, you can talk to the other person to find a solution.

The word **trouble** is more connected with general difficulties. We often use the phrase "having trouble" to mean "having difficulty":

- I'm **having trouble** sleeping. = I'm having difficulty sleeping.

If someone "is in trouble" or "gets in trouble," it means they are in a bad situation:

- The boy **got in trouble** for stealing a toy from the store.
  (= he will be disciplined)
- If sales don't start improving soon, our company will **be in trouble.**
  (= the company will have difficulty surviving)

The word **problem** is countable, and the word **trouble** is usually uncountable. We can say "a problem," but not "a trouble."

- There's **a problem** with my online bank account.
- I'm having **some trouble** logging into my bank account.
- The speaker talked about **five** major **problems** in society. *(not five **troubles**)*

quiet / silent

The basic difference is that **quiet** can mean little or no noise, but **silent** means ZERO noise. If you describe somebody as **quiet,** it means that person doesn't talk very much. People can also **talk quietly** (with a very low volume) but it's impossible to talk silently!

raise / rise / arise

The basic meaning is the same – for something to go up to a higher level.

The difference is that **raise** *must* have a direct object (one thing is making another thing go up) whereas **rise** does not have a direct object (one thing is going up by itself). Here are some examples:

- Something **raises** something else:
  - The student **raised** his hand.
  - The government will **raise** taxes.
  - The store is **raising** their prices.
- Something **rises:**
  - In the morning, the sun **rises.**
  - She **rose** from her chair.
    (She stood up)
  - Unemployment has **risen** by 10% in the past year.

One reason for the confusion is that an increase in salary is called a **pay raise** in American English, but a **pay rise** in British English.

Arise is similar to rise, but is more formal and abstract. It can also be used to mean "appear":

- Several important questions **arose** during the meeting.
- I'd like to work in Japan, if the opportunity **arises.**
- A new spirit of hope has **arisen** among the country's people.
- Sorry, I'll need to cancel our appointment. A few problems have **arisen.**

regard / regards / regardless

Regard (v.) is to consider or to have an opinion about something:

- Picasso is **regarded** as one of the greatest artists in history.
- I don't **regard** this as a problem; I **regard** it as an opportunity.

Regards (n.) is a greeting:

- Please give my **regards** to your parents when you see them.
- Some people end their letters/emails with the expression **Regards,** or **With best regards,**

The phrases **regarding** and **in/with regard to** mean "related to / concerning the following topic":

- Have you read the report **regarding** the economic crisis?
- Before finalizing the contract, there are a few points I'd like to clarify **with regard to** the deadlines.

These phrases are more formal, and in everyday spoken English we'd say "about" instead: "Have you read the report about the economic crisis?"

Regardless (adv.) means one thing is not affected by something else:

- A champion keeps going, **regardless** of the difficulties.
- The mayor approved the new law **regardless** of the opposition from the public.
- I know we don't have all the information, but we still need to make a decision, **regardless.**

As you can see from the examples, the action (keep going / approving the law / making a decision) is not affected by the other situation (the difficulties / the opposition / not having all the information).

Don't use the word **"irregardless"** – it doesn't exist; it is a common error in English.

regretful / regrettable

A person who feels regret is **regretful**. The incident or situation that causes regret is **regrettable:**

- The murderer said he was deeply **regretful** of the pain he had caused the victim's family.

- I'm **regretful** of my decision not to study abroad. I should have traveled when I had the chance.
- The church had to be repaired after a **regrettable** incident of vandalism.
- The two companies failed to reach an agreement due to a **regrettable** miscommunication. The CEO was **regretful** that the opportunity for a partnership was lost.

This rule – **regretful** for the person's feelings, and **regrettable** for the situation – extends to the adverb forms regretfully and regrettably.

- He **regretfully** informed the judges that he would be withdrawing from the competition. **Regrettably**, he had injured his ankle in the previous round.
- **Regrettably**, the new law increased unemployment instead of decreasing it. One senator **regretfully** said that voting in favor of the law had been a mistake.

relation / relationship

Relationship can describe a connection between two *people* (this connection may be romantic or not):

- I've been dating my boyfriend for three years. We have a great **relationship.**
- He has a terrible **relationship** with his father.
- My sister and I have a good **relationship.**

Both **relationship** and **relation** can describe connections between two *things or ideas:*

- I'm studying the **relationship** between education levels and poverty.
- There's a close **relation** between smoking and lung disease.

The word **relations** (plural) is used with general connections in a specific category:

- international relations
- diplomatic relations
- public relations
- race relations

- sexual relations
  etc.

Although **relations** can mean the people who are biologically related to you, it's more common to call these people **relatives.**

remember / remind / reminder

Remember (v.) is when you think of a memory (a past experience):

- I **remember** the first time I ever swam in the ocean, when I was 5 years old.
- Do you **remember** that great presentation on marketing that we saw at the conference?
- I don't think he **remembers** that we met 30 years ago.

Remember is also the opposite of "forget." You can use **remember** to talk about keeping something in your mind:

- Please **remember** to wash the dishes after you finish eating lunch.
- I was already at work when I suddenly **remembered** I had a dentist appointment at 9:30. I called the dentist and rescheduled it for the next day.
- I can't **remember** her name. Is it Alice or Annie?

Remind (v.) is when a person or thing makes you remember or think about something.

- My mother **reminded me** to wash the dishes after I finished eating lunch.
- The secretary **reminded Mr. Greene** that he had a meeting at 4:30.
- Our shopping list **reminds us** what we need to buy at the supermarket.

A **reminder** (n.) is a thing that reminds you. Notes, cell phone alerts, and statements from other people can function as **reminders.**

replace / substitute

Both of these words mean to put something in place of another, but there are a few differences in usage. Let's look at two cases: with people and with objects.

Replacements tend to be long-term or permanent. They often involve something of the same type:

- If a part in your car breaks, you need to **replace** it with a new version of the same part.

However, in the case of advancing technology and changing trends, you can **replace** an older thing with a newer and different thing:

- Cell phones are **replacing** traditional cameras.

When talking about people, if one person **replaces** another, the new person takes the position *permanently:*

- After Gary resigned, Susan **replaced** him as the director of finance.

With the word **substitute,** in the case of people, it is temporary.

- If your regular teacher gets sick, a substitute teacher will come into the classroom for a few days.
- If a player on a sports team gets injured, a substitute will go into the game in the injured player's position or role.

In the case of objects, **substitute** is usually used when something different takes the place of the original. If a part in your car breaks and that part is no longer being manufactured, the mechanic might substitute a similar part that can perform in a similar way.

We often use **substitute** with food and cooking - if you are trying to lose weight, you might substitute margarine for butter in a recipe. If you are a vegetarian, you might substitute mushrooms or tofu for meat when preparing a stir-fry.

When ordering in a restaurant, you can also ask the waitress to be flexible when your meal comes with options: "Could I **substitute** a salad for the soup?" means "May I have a salad in place of the soup?"

resolve / solve

This is a tough one – do you **solve a problem** or **resolve a problem?**

The answer is both. **Solve** and **resolve** do have slightly different meanings, though.

To **resolve** something means to deal with and finish it in a satisfactory way:

- **resolve** an argument
- **resolve** a conflict / dispute
- **resolve** differences between two people or two opinions

When something is resolved, it may not have been resolved in the best way; but at least it is settled.

To **solve** something means to find the CORRECT answer, or to fix it successfully:

- You **solve** a math problem (find the *right* answer)
- The police **solve** a crime (find the *truth* about it)
- A detective **solves** a mystery (discover the *truth*)
- If something on the website is not working, and you discover the reason for the problem and fix it successfully, you have **solved** the problem.

Problems can be **solved** or **resolved** depending on their nature. When there are multiple opinions and points of view that must be reconciled, we usually use **resolve:**

- The Human Resources department is trying to **resolve** the problem between the manager and his employees.

When there is probably a correct answer, a successful solution that will eliminate the problem, we usually use **solve:**

- The payroll department is trying to **solve** the problem of the paychecks going to the wrong bank accounts – it's probably a computer bug that needs to be fixed.

review / revise

If you **review** a document, it means you read it and examine it (and maybe have some ideas to improve it) - but you don't make any changes.

If you **revise** a document, it means you change the text to correct errors or make improvements.

When preparing for a test, it's a good idea to study the material again in order to refresh your memory. American English speakers say you are **reviewing for the test.** British English speakers say you are **revising for the test.**

rob / thief / steal

The nouns **robber** and **thief** refer to *the person, the criminal:*

Image source

- The **robbers** ran away from the police.
- The **thief** took my laptop and cell phone.
- "Give me all your money!" the **robber** said.
- The **thieves** were tall, white men who looked about 22 years old.

The **robbery (n.)** is *the event:*

- Police are investigating the **robbery** of the Main Street Bank.
- The **robbery** occurred at 4:30 PM.
- Three employees were injured during the **robbery.**

The word **theft (n.)** describes *the event or the crime* (in the justice system)

- He was sentenced to eight years in prison for the **theft** of a motorcycle.
- We immediately called the police to report the **theft**.
- Ken was accused of identity **theft.**

To **rob (v.)** is the action. It is often used in the past as **robbed:**

- Donald **robbed** five stores before being caught by the police.
- My favorite pizza shop was **robbed** last month. Luckily, no one was hurt.
- I was **robbed** at gunpoint while walking home from work.

The verb **steal** and the adjective/past participle **stolen** refer to the action of taking something specific. These words are always used together with an object – the object that was taken.

- The thief **stole** a gold necklace from the woman's bedroom.
- Wendy's wallet was **stolen** on the subway.
- Jim was caught **stealing** money from his own company.
- Rachel tried to **steal** Carla's boyfriend.

To describe a thief entering a building, we can also use the phrasal verb **break into:**

- "My house was **broken into** last month."
- "Oh, really? Was anything stolen?"
- "Yes, they took my DVD player and some jewelry."

safety / security

Although the dictionary definitions of these words are the same, they are often used slightly differently.

The word **safety** usually means protection from injury, accidents, and dangerous situations or substances. Seatbelts and airbags are **safety** measures to protect you in a car crash. Following regulations properly helps keep factory workers **safe** from accidents. If a nuclear reactor explodes, the people in the surrounding areas must be evacuated to **safety.**

The word **security** usually means protection from dangerous *people* (thieves, criminals, terrorists, etc.) A **security guard** helps protect a bank from robbers.

A country's government is concerned about **national security** - protecting the country from invaders. Many **security measures** are taken to protect a country's president from people who might want to try to kill him.

Image source: AIVEN

The one exception is when talking about the danger of being in certain neighborhoods, areas, or countries - you might say "It's not **safe** to walk around the

city at night" even though the danger is from people like thieves, attackers, rapists. It's more natural to say "It's not safe" rather than "It's not secure."

Finally, the word **security** also refers to something stable. If you have **job security**, it means your job will last a long time and you probably will not lose it.

sale / sell

Sell is a verb and **sale** is a noun:

- I'm going to **sell** my car and buy a new one.
- She's **selling** bottles of water at the football game.
- Yesterday I **sold** all of my old college textbooks on the internet.
- The bookstore is having a Christmas **sale** - everything is 20% off.
  (20% off = 20% discount)
- The **sales** of our new product are slowly increasing.
- This watch is normally $100, but it's **on sale** for $70.
  (on sale = there is a discount)

There's also a pronunciation difference between **sale** and **sell.**

say / tell / speak

Tell means "to give information **to a person**" – so **tell** (present) and **told** (past) are always followed by a person.

Examples:

- **Tell me** about the movie. Did you like it?
- Peter, I **told you** not to eat any cookies before dinner!
- Did you **tell Sam** about what happened at school today?
- The police **told us** that the situation was under control.
- Derek and Melissa **told everybody** that they were engaged to be married.

- You should **tell her** what you think about her idea.
- Don't worry, I won't **tell anyone** your secret.

With **say** (present) or **said** (past), we can use these structures:

1. **say (something)**
2. **say that (something)**
3. **say (something) to (a person)**
4. **"(something)" a person said**

Examples:

1. Francis **says** she doesn't like chocolate.
2. I **said that** I'd be home from work early.
3. What did the teacher **say to you** when you failed the test?
4. "Nice to meet you," Harry **said.**

Structures #1 and #2 are the most common in spoken English.

Don't make this common mistake!

- ~~He **said me** that he had to leave.~~
- He **told me** that he had to leave.
- He **said** that he had to leave.

Use **speak** (present) and **spoke** (past) with languages, and with talking in general (no specific details). We can use **speak with (someone)** and **speak to (someone)**

Examples:

- I **speak** English.
- Does Donna **speak** Italian?
- Emma is going to **speak** in front of 500 people at the conference.
- We **spoke** to the boss this morning. (general conversation, no specific details)
- I need to **speak** with you about the new project. (general topic, no details)

In the case of **speak with (someone)** and **speak to (someone),** you can also say **talk to** or **talk with.**

However, you can't use "talk" with languages:

- ~~I don't **talk** Chinese.~~
- I don't **speak** Chinese.

scream / shout

Shouting is simply speaking loudly or making a loud sound. If you saw your friend some distance away at a crowded park, you might shout her name to get her attention. A soccer coach might shout instructions to the players on the field. Shouting can be angry, joyful, or neutral.

When you **scream,** you make a long, loud, high-pitched sound. People usually scream in moments of fear or pain. It is often a reflex action (screaming when something frightens you) but you can also scream intentionally. A parent whose small child starts to wander out into the street might scream for him to stop. People who are trapped in a car after an accident might scream for help.

sensible / sensitive

Sensible means having a good practical awareness or understanding of a situation:

- This is a very **sensible** article – it's a realistic description of both points of view in the debate.
- I'm more of a dreamer, and my husband is the **sensible** one. I come up with crazy ideas and he tells me if they'll actually work.

Sensitive means easily affected – physically or emotionally:

- My skin is very **sensitive** – it gets irritated easily.
- He's so **sensitive** that he gets depressed for weeks if you criticize his work.

shade / shadow

Shade is the general dark area that is protected from the sun:

- It's so hot out – let's sit in the **shade.**
- We brought an umbrella to the beach so that we could have some **shade.**

Image source: Superior National Forest

A **shadow** is the "shape" of an object or person that blocks the light. You can only have "shade" from the sun, but you can have a "shadow" from the sun OR other types of light, such as electric lights or candlelight.

- My dog is afraid of his own **shadow.**
- A lunar eclipse occurs when the moon passes through the earth's **shadow.**

Image source: Nevit Dilmen

We can also use the word **shadows** to refer to a dark area in general:

- He jumped out from the **shadows** of the basement and scared me half to death.
- Something moved in the **shadows** of the forest.

so / such

The rule here is simple:

- **so** + adjective
- **such** + adjective + noun (person/object described)

Compare these sentences:

- Their dog is **so cute.**
- They have **such a cute *dog*.**
- Her kids are **so obedient.**
- She has **such obedient *kids.***

Both **so** and **such** can be used in sentences where we add **that + result:**

- My teacher is **so patient.**
- My teacher is **so patient that she helps students for hours after class.**
- That restaurant has **such good food.**
- That restaurant has **such good food that it's always full of people.**

so / very / a lot

Use **a lot of** *before nouns* to mean a large quantity or a high number. "A lot of" can be used with both countable and uncountable nouns.

- There were **a lot of students** in the classroom.
- I drank **a lot of water** during the marathon.

Use **verb + a lot** to mean "very much" or "frequently":

I **like** this singer **a lot.**
= I like this singer very much.

She **travels a lot** for work.
= She travels frequently for work.

"A lot" is always two words, never one word!

- ~~I studied **alot** for the English test.~~
- I studied **a lot** for the English test.

Use **so** and **very** *before adjectives*. We can use the structure **so + adjective + that** to add extra information, usually a result or consequence:

- Last night I was **very tired.**
  Last night I was **so tired** that I almost fell asleep while driving.
- This book is **very interesting**.
  This book is **so interesting** that I stayed up until 3 AM reading it!
- She plays the piano **very well.**
  She plays the piano **so well** that people often ask if she's a professional.

Common Error: Don't use **"a lot"** with adjectives:

- ~~Last night I was **a lot** tired.~~

In informal spoken English, it's common to use **"really"** instead of **"very"**:

- Last night I was **really tired.**
- This book is **really interesting.**
- She plays the piano **really well.**

Also, in informal spoken English some people use "so" without adding extra information, particularly when making an exclamation:

- Your dog is **so** cute!
- It's **so** windy today!
- That test was **so** hard!

some time / sometime / sometimes

Some time (two words) means a period of time:

- It took me **some time** to fix the computer; it had a number of problems.
- I spend **some time** listening to English every day.
- Sarah worked at that company for quite **some time.**
  (quite some time = a long time)

Sometime (one word) refers to an unspecified time, usually in the future, although it can be in the past as well, as in the third example:

- Let's get together for lunch **sometime.**
- I'll call you **sometime** this afternoon.
- I don't remember exactly when I bought this shirt, but it was **sometime** in the past year.

Sometimes means occasionally:

- Usually I wake up early, but **sometimes** I sleep late.
- **Sometimes** we have to work on Saturdays, if there's a special event.
- While reading this text, I **sometimes** had to look a word up in the dictionary.

stuff / things

The word **thing / things** is countable. It refers to specific objects, or a collection of specific objects:

- There are five **things** in the box.
- I forgot my wallet, my phone, and a few other **things** when I left home today.

The word **stuff** can also refer to a general collection of things (usually someone's possessions), but it is vaguer and also *uncountable,* meaning there is no plural (no such word as "stuffs"):

- You need to clean up your bedroom, your **stuff** is all over the floor.
  (= clothes, books, toys, objects, etc.)
- After the holiday, we put all the Christmas **stuff** away until the next year.
  (= ornaments, decorations, etc.)

Stuff can also refer to a material – usually when we don't know exactly what it is:

- "What's that white **stuff** all over the table?"
  "Oh – I spilled some sugar while I was baking a cake."
- "I'm not sure what kind of **stuff** this pillow is made of, but it sure is comfortable."

Both **things** and **stuff** can be *non-physical* items as well:

- There are five **things** you need to know in order to do this job well.
  (= five principles / pieces of information)
- My history class is so hard! There's so much **stuff** the teacher expects us to remember. *(= information, facts)*
- I'm proud of you because you did the right **thing.** *(= action)*
- The best **thing** about this program is that you can study at your own pace.
  (= aspect)
- She's really stressed out because there's a lot of **stuff** going on in her personal life right now. *(= difficulties, events, changes)*
- My brother knows a lot about astronomy **and stuff like that.** *(= and related/similar topics)*

Finally, **stuff** can be a verb meaning to push things into a small space:

- I **stuffed** a week's worth of clothes into a tiny backpack.
- These peppers are **stuffed** with chicken and cheese.
  (We often use "stuffed" when one type of food is put inside another. There's also the informal expression "I'm stuffed!" which means "I'm so full of food that I can't eat any more!")

such as / as such

Such as means "like" or "for example":

- There are lots of things to see in New York City, **such as** the Statue of Liberty, Central Park, and Times Square.
- Many of Paulo Coelho's books, **such as** *The Alchemist,* are famous worldwide.

Note: "For example" is typically used to start a sentence; "such as" (more formal) and "like" (informal) are used in the middle of the sentence.

As such is used to avoid repeating information that was recently stated:

- I'm a working mother, and <u>because I'm a working mother</u>, I don't have much free time. → *this is not ideal because we repeat a phrase*
- I'm a working mother, and **as such,** I don't have much free time.

As such can be used at the beginning of a sentence to refer to information stated in the previous sentence:

- This is the most popular English school in town. **As such,** it has a waiting list for new students. (As such = As the most popular English school in town.)

suppose / supposed to

The word **suppose** means something like think, believe, imagine, or expect:

- He's not answering his cell phone. I **suppose** he's already gone to bed; after all, it's midnight.
- I **suppose** her interview went well – she said she was happy with it.

The expression **supposed to** refers to a rule. It means something *should* be done, but it was not (or is not usually) done:

- I was **supposed to** go to work today, but I'm sick so I stayed home.
- We're **supposed to** park our cars in the company garage, but most people just park on the street.

then / than

Although these words are spelled differently and have different meanings, in fast spoken English they often sound the same: **then** and **than.**

Than is used in comparatives:

- I'm older **than** my brother.
- A car is faster **than** a bicycle.
- I learned more from my parents **than** I learned from my teachers.

Then is used in several ways:

To describe the next event in a sequence:

- First we went to the store, and **then** we went to the post office.
  (then = next event in the sequence)

To mean "at that time":

- Come to my house at 7:30, I'll be ready **then.**
  (then = at that time)

To mean "in that case"

- If the bank is closed, **then** you'll have to make the deposit tomorrow.
  (then = in that case)

Again, in spoken English, these words often **sound exactly the same!**

think about / think of

The two most common prepositions used after the verb "think" are "about" and "of." They are very similar, but there is a small difference.

Usually when you **think of** something, it is a brief moment – just a few seconds. It is also used for opinions. When you **think about** something, you are considering it for a longer time – like a few minutes or more.

- Every time I hear this song, I **think of** my mother.
  (thinking for a few seconds)
- What do you **think of** my new haircut?
  (opinion)
- I'm **thinking about** moving to a different city.
  (considering)
- I still get angry when I **think about** all the rude things my sister said to me.
  (thinking for a few minutes or more)

Common error: Don't use **"think to"** for "considering."

- ~~I'm **thinking to do** an intensive English course in Canada.~~
- I'm **thinking about doing** an intensive English course in Canada.

tide / waves

Waves are the raised swells of water that move along the surface of the ocean. At the beach, surfers ride on the waves:

The size of the waves depends on the general movement of the ocean water in the area, the shape of the sea floor, and whether there are storms or strong winds that can produce bigger waves.

The word **tide** refers to the variation in the general level of the ocean. Tides are caused by the gravitational forces of the moon and sun, as well as the rotation of the earth. Many places have one or two times of **high tide** and **low tide** per day:

till / until

Till is just a short form of **until,** and in spoken English, you can use either one with no difference in meaning:

- You can't watch TV **until** you finish your homework.
  = You can't watch TV **till** you finish your homework.
- I'll be in a meeting **until** 3:30.
  = I'll be in a meeting **till** 3:30.

In more formal written English, **until** is the preferred form - and usually when the word starts the sentence, we also prefer to use **until:**

- **Until** you finish your homework, you can't watch TV.
- ~~Till you finish your homework, you can't watch TV.~~

to / for

Use TO in these cases:

1. **Destination**
   "We're going **to** Paris."
2. **What time it is**
   "It's a quarter **to** 6."
3. **Distance**
   "It's about ten miles from my house **to** the university."
4. **Comparing**
   "I prefer sleeping **to** working."

5. **Giving**
   "I gave the book **to** my sister."
6. **Motive/Reason – with verb**
   "I came here **to see** you."

Use FOR in these cases:

1. **Benefits**
   "Yogurt is good **for** your digestion."
2. **Period of time**
   "We've lived here **for** 2 years."
3. **Schedule**
   "I made an appointment **for** May 3."
4. **Agree with**
   "Are you **for** or against the development of nuclear weapons?"
5. **Doing something to help someone**
   "Could you carry these books **for** me?"
6. **Motive/Reason – with noun**
   "Let's go out **for** a drink."
7. **Function – with verb (-ing form)**
   "A ladle is a big spoon used **for serving** soup."

As you can see in #6, **TO** or **FOR** can be used for a motive/reason, but **TO is always with a verb**, and **FOR is always with a noun.** Here's a good example:

- I'm here **to see** you.
  ~~I'm here **for** see you.~~
- I'm here **for our appointment.**

too / very

Very and **too** have different meanings. Consider this example:

- I have $100.
- This bottle of wine costs $90. It's **very expensive**, but I can buy it.
- That bottle of wine costs $150. It's **too expensive**, so I can't buy it.

"Very" in front of an adjective amplifies it. To amplify something even more than "very," you can say "extremely":

- It's 75°F. It's hot.
- It's 90°F. It's very hot.
- It's 105°F. It's extremely hot.

"Too" means "more than the limit." For example:

- You must be 17 years old to watch this movie. Jackson is 14. He's **too young**.
- This shirt is a size large, and I need a size small. The shirt is **too big** for me.
- The train left at 8:00 and we got to the station at 8:30. We arrived **too late.**

Remember, use **too much** and **too many** before *nouns…* and use **too** before *adjectives.* You can't say "The shirt is too much big." – because "big" is an adjective.

travel / trip / journey

A **trip** (n.) is the act of going to another place (often for a short period of time) and returning.

- We took a five-day **trip** to the Amazon.
- You're back from vacation! How was your **trip**?
- I went on business **trips** to Switzerland and Germany last month.

Use the verbs "take" and "go on" with **trip**. Always use **trip** (not travel) after **a** and **the,** and after possessives like **my, your, our, their, his,** and **her:**

- I bought this hat on my last ~~**travel**~~ **trip** to Europe.
- She got really sick on the ~~**travel**~~ **trip** to the island.
- Our ~~**travel**~~ **trip** to Disneyland was very memorable.

A **round-trip ticket** is a ticket for going and coming back; and a **one-way ticket** is only for going.

The verb **travel** means going to another place (in general).

- I really like to **travel.**
- He **travels** frequently for work.
- My sister is currently **traveling** through South America.

Travel (n.) can be used to describe the act of traveling in general:

- **Travel** in that region of the country is dangerous.
- World **travel** gives you a new perspective.

Incorrect uses of travel:

- ~~How was your **travel?**~~
  How was your **trip**?
- ~~I'm planning a **travel** to the U.S. next year.~~
  I'm planning **to travel** to the U.S. next year.
  I'm planning **a trip** to the U.S. next year.

A **journey** (n.) is the act of going from one place to another – usually a long distance.

- The **journey** takes 3 hours by plane or 28 hours by bus.
- He made the 200-mile **journey** by bike.
- "A **journey** of a thousand miles must begin with a single step"
  - Lao-tze, *Tao Te Ching*

We can also use **journey** in a more "metaphorical" way to talk about progress in life:

- He has overcome a lot of problems on his spiritual **journey.**
- My uncle is an alcoholic, but he's beginning the **journey** to recovery.

used to / be used to

One meaning of **used to** is "accustomed to" – when something was strange or different for you in the past, but now you think it's normal:

- When I first moved to Korea, I didn't like the food – but now **I'm used to** it.
- **We're used to** waking up early – we do it every day.

- My 4-year-old son cried on the first day of school; he **wasn't used to** being away from his mother the whole day.
- It took me a long time to **get used to** driving on the right side of the road after I moved from New York to London.
- So, you've lived in Finland for 5 years – **are you used to** the cold weather yet?

Before this form of used to, we use the verbs **BE** and **GET** – "be" to describe the state of being accustomed to something, and "get" to describe the process of becoming accustomed to something. After this form of used to, we use a **noun** or the **-ing form:**

- I got **used to the food** here.
- I got **used to eating** raw fish.

The form of **used to** meaning "accustomed to" is pronounced with an S sound. **Used to** pronounced with a Z sound is different: it describes the way something is utilized:

- A knife is **used to** cut vegetables.
- Textbooks are **used to** teach students.

In this case, we can also say **used in** (a place) and **used for** (a purpose)**:**

- Textbooks are **used in** the classroom.
- Textbooks are **used for** teaching students.

Another meaning of **used to** is to describe actions you did repeatedly in the past, but that you don't do now:

- When I was a child, I **used to** go to the beach with my grandparents.
- He **used to** play tennis, but he stopped a few years ago.
- She **didn't use to** like vegetables, but now she eats them frequently.
- They **didn't use to** come to church, but now they're among the most dedicated members.

This form of **used to** is pronounced with an S sound, and notice the negative form: **didn't use to.** After it, we use the infinitive of the verb: used to **go**, used to **play,** didn't use to **like,** didn't use to **come.**

wake / awake / sleep / asleep

Sleep and **wake** are verbs (although we usually use "wake up" for when you stop sleeping, and "go to sleep" for the moment when you begin sleeping):

- My kids **go to sleep** at 10 PM.
- I **slept** during the 6-hour flight.
- I **wake up** at 7 AM and I have to be at work by 8.
- Yesterday I **woke up** late because my alarm didn't go off.

You can also use **wake up** for the action of making someone else stop sleeping:

- Don't talk so loudly! You'll **wake up the baby!**
- Your sister is taking a short nap. Can you **wake her up** in about 20 minutes?

Awake and **asleep** are adjectives. Use them with the verb **to be:**

- **He's awake.** = He isn't sleeping.
- **He's asleep.** = He is sleeping.

It's common to use the expressions **stay awake / stay up** (to continue awake) and **fall asleep** (to begin sleeping):

- On New Year's Eve, my children **stay awake** until midnight.
- I always **fall asleep** in history class – it's so boring!

wander / wonder

These are two completely different words, but sometimes students confuse them because of their similar spelling and pronunciation.

Wander is a *physical activity.* It means to move around (usually walking) without a specific destination or purpose:

- On the first day of my trip, I spent a couple hours **wandering** around the city.
- We **wandered** through the park, looking at the flowers.

Wonder is a *mental activity.* It means to feel curiosity**,** to want to know something.

- I **wonder** what happened to my friend from elementary school? We haven't been in touch for years.
- Your wife is **wondering** what time you'll be home – please give her a call.

Note: This is the verb form of "wonder." There is also a noun form, which means "awe or admiration."

There's also a pronunciation difference:

- The WAN of wander is like the WAN of "want."
- The WON of wonder is like the words "won" or "one."

wary / weary

Wary means "suspicious" or "cautious," and **weary** means "very tired."

- $1000 for a new car? I'm **wary** of that offer – it sounds too good to be true.
- Every parent has days when they become **weary.**

There is a small pronunciation difference between **wary** and **weary:**

- The **ar** in **wary** is like in the words **care** and **hair.**
- The **ear** in **weary** is like in the words **beer** and **here.**

what / which

We usually prefer to use **which** when choosing between a limited number of options (like two or three, or options from inside a category) and **what** when there is no limit to the number of options:

- **Which** do you like better – ketchup or mustard?
  (only two options)

- **Which** philosophy books do you recommend?
  (options from inside the category of "philosophy books")
- **What** do you think about politics?
  (there are infinite possible answers)
- **What's** wrong with the TV?
  (there are infinite possible answers)

However, in spoken English, we often use "what" even when "which" would technically be better:

- I have black tea and green tea. **What** kind do you want?

The only time we MUST use "which" is when saying **which of** or **which one(s):**

- **Which of** the students are going to fail the course?
- Bob and Jerry, **which one** of you is going to help me fix the window?
- All these cakes look delicious. I don't know **which one** to buy!
- I'm considering several different cars; I'm doing research to find out **which ones** are most reliable.

which / that

To understand when to use **which** and **that,** we first need to understand the idea of **defining** and **non-defining** relative clauses.

Non-defining relative clauses add EXTRA information to the sentence.

Defining relative clauses add ESSENTIAL information to the sentence.

Here's an example. Let's imagine that it's Friday, and I say:

- The bananas **that** I bought on Monday are rotten.
- The bananas, **which** I bought on Monday, are rotten.

In the first sentence, it's possible that we have two types of bananas in the house:

- Older bananas - bought on Monday

- Newer bananas - bought on Wednesday

…and that only the older bananas are rotten, but the newer bananas are not rotten. This means that the phrase "that I bought on Monday" is **essential information** (a defining clause)**,** because it tells us which group of bananas we are talking about.

In the second sentence, all the bananas in the house were bought on Monday, and they are all rotten. In this case, "which I bought on Monday" is **extra information** (a non-defining clause).

Use **that** with **defining clauses** (essential information).

Use **which** with **non-defining clauses** (extra information) – and use a comma before it.

- This is the book **that** I want to buy.
  ("that I want to buy" is essential because it defines the book we are talking about)
- This book, **which** I bought recently, is very good.
  ("which I bought recently" is extra information; it is not essential to the main point of the sentence – This book is very good)

who / whom

Who is the SUBJECT. The subject performs the action:

- **Who ate the last piece of pizza?**
  who = subject
  ate = verb
- **The students who failed the test will need extra help.**
  the students / who = subject
  failed = verb

Whom is the OBJECT. The object receives the action:

- **Bob gave the money to whom?**
  Bob = subject
  gave = verb
  money = direct object
  whom = indirect object

Whom is always used after a **PREPOSITION.**

- My three brothers, one **of whom** is a doctor, live in New York.
  (of = preposition)
- **With whom** did you go to the movies?
  (with = preposition)
- That's the employee **at whom** I yelled.
  (at = preposition)
- I no longer speak to the person **from whom** I got this gift.
  (from = preposition)

BIG EXCEPTION IN SPOKEN ENGLISH!
In spoken English, we often use "who" not "whom," and end sentences with prepositions… even when it is technically incorrect:

- **Who** did Bob give the money **to**?
- **Who** did you go to the movies **with**?
- That's the employee **who** I yelled **at.**
- I no longer speak to the person **who** I got this gift **from**.

will / would

Use will:

1. to talk about the future

   Ex) The bus **will** leave at 8:30.

Ex) Elections are next month. I think the president **will** be re-elected.

2. to make promises and offers – when in statement form (not in question form):

   Ex) Sorry I was late to class today. I**'ll** be on time tomorrow.
   (promise)

   Ex) I**'ll** give you a ride home from work. *(offer – in statement form)*
   *(offer – in question form): **Would** you like a ride?*

Would is the past tense of **will.** We use **would:**

1. to talk about the past

   Ex) Elections were held last week. I thought the president **would** be re-elected, but he wasn't.

   Ex) Yesterday he said he **would** give me a ride, but he forgot to pick me up and I had to take the bus.

2. to talk about hypothetical (imaginary) situations

   Ex) If I had the money, I**'d** buy a motorcycle.

   Ex) If it was sunny today, I**'d** go to the beach – but unfortunately it's raining.

   *We often use the short form, **'d.***

3. for politeness

   Ex) **Would** you like something to eat?
   (offer in the form of a question)

   Ex) **Would** you mind turning down the volume?
   (request in the form of a question)

   Ex) I**'d** like a small hot chocolate, please.
   ("I'd like" is a more polite way to say "I want")

Ex) I'**d** rather take a taxi, not the bus.
(a polite way to express a preference)

worse / worst

Worse is the comparative (comparing two things). **Worst** is the superlative (comparing 3+ things, or comparing one thing with everything).

- I thought the second movie was **worse** than the first one.
  (comparing two movies)
- That's the **worst** movie I've ever seen.
  (always use "the" before "worst")
  (comparing one movie with ALL the others)

In fast spoken English, it's often hard to hear the difference between them in pronunciation.

year-old / years old

When you say the age of someone or something, you can say **subject + is + # years old:**

- I'm thirty **years old.**
- That boy is fourteen **years old.**
- These houses are 200 **years old.**

When you want to say the age *before* the subject, then use **#-year-old:**

- My **twenty-year-old** sister
- A **fourteen-year-old** boy
- The **200-year-old** houses

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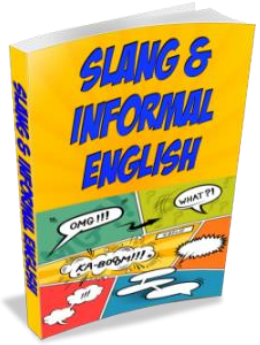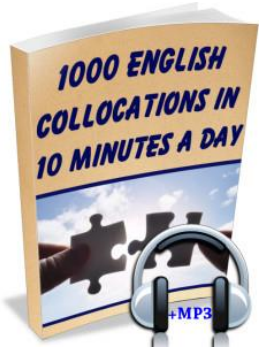
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