

Frequently Misused Words

accede: to agree (*I accede to your demands.*)

exceed: to surpass (*I exceed my goals.*)

accept: to receive

except: to exclude- usually a preposition (*I can accept everything except your behavior*)

adapt: to fit for a new use (*Can she adapt to the situation?*)

adept: proficient (*You're adept at painting.*)

adopt: to take as one's own (*Let's adopt these new standards.*)

affect: verb- to influence (*Did the movie affect your mood?*)

effect: noun- result (*It had no effect on me.*)

effect: verb- to bring about (*I tried to effect a change.*)

aggravate: to make worse (*Don't aggravate my headache!*)

irritate: to annoy (*You are irritating me!*)

alley: a narrow passageway

ally: a friend (*He took his ally to a side alley.*)

allusion: an indirect reference (Literary allusions are confusing.)

illusion: a misleading appearance (*That picture is an optical illusion.*)

delusion: an error of judgment (*He's suffering from delusions of grandeur.*)

all ready: completely ready

already: previously (*I was all ready to go, but my ride had already left.*)

altar: a sacred place of worship

alter: to change (*I don't want you to alter once I get you to the altar.*)

alright: unacceptable form of all right

a lot: unacceptable form of a lot

all together: in one body (*We were all together at the inn.*)

altogether: wholly, completely (*We are not altogether free of problems.*)

among: used for three or more objects (*You are among friends.*)

between: applies to only two objects (*A rat ran between my legs.*)

amount: refers to quantity (*It amounts to \$10.*)

number: refers to things that can be counted (*I have a number of ideas.*)

and/or: using and/or is a confusing short cut that should be avoided (*Did you see John or Jim or both [not John and/or Jim]?*)

anxious: informal for eager or desirous (*I am eager [not anxious] to sleep.*)

any place, every place: incorrect in formal usage; use anywhere and everywhere

anyways: incorrect for anyway

anywheres: incorrect for anywhere

everywheres: incorrect for everywhere

around: refers to place, not time (*What can we do around here?*)

about: use to refer to time

at about: unnecessary; use at or about (*Did you see a cat about [not at about] two?*)

ascent: act of rising, climbing

assent: to express agreement (*The hiking expert gave his assent to the planned ascent.*)

avocation: a secondary occupation or hobby

vocation: a regular occupation (*My vocation is accounting but my avocation is photography.*)

back of: unacceptable substitute for behind (*I sit behind [not back of] Charley.*)

balance: a bookkeeping term (*Show me your bank balance.*)

remainder: the part left over (*I spent the remainder of my vacation in California.*)

blame...on: informal version of blame, unacceptable in formal usage (*Why did you blame me for it [not blame it on me]?*)

borrow: a person borrows from a friend (*I want to borrow your notes.*)

lend: a person lends to a friend (*Will you lend me your car?*)

loan: usually a noun, but may be used as a verb (*I can't pay my car loan.*)

breath: respiration (*Try to catch your breath.*)

breathe: to inhale and exhale (*Breathe, man!*)

can: used for ability (*You can dance.*)

may: used for permission; also used after a verb in present tense (*Don says you may lie.*)

might: used after a verb in the past tense (*Mom said you might lie.*)

canvas: a cloth

canvass: to seek votes, opinions (*Let's canvass opinions on this new canvas sail.*)

complement: something that completes

compliment: an expression of admiration (*I want to compliment you on your complement of men.*)

conscience: sense of right and wrong (*Be guided by your conscience.*)

conscious: aware (*He was conscious during the operation.*)

consul: a delegate of a government

council: a body of people (*I ran for council.*)

counsel: advice, or a lawyer (*The Indian consul gave me counsel on my visit to India.*)

contemptible: deserving contempt

contemptuous: showing contempt (*They were contemptuous of his contemptible attitude.*)

deadly: causing death

deathly: looking like death (*Her deadly stare and deathly lips attracted me.*)

disinterested: unselfish (*Her disinterested action meant a lot to me.*)

uninterested: without interest (*She was uninterested in me.*)

eminent: distinguished

imminent: threatening to occur immediately (*The imminent storm stopped the experiments of the eminent scientist.*)

had have, had of: incorrect for had (*if they had [not had of] tried, they might have won.*)

its: belonging to it

it's: it is (*It's time to trim its fur*)

later: further on in time (*It's later than that.*)

latter: the second of two (*If the choice is money or freedom, I choose the latter.*)

learn: to acquire knowledge

teach: to give instruction (*Let him teach you, so that you might learn.*)

loose: unbound (*The prisoner is loose.*)

lose: to fail, cease to have (*Lose that attitude.*)

may be: a verb (*It may be true.*)

maybe: adverb- perhaps (*Maybe I'll leave.*)

notable: famous (*I'm a notable teacher.*)

notorious: infamous (*He's a notorious slob.*)

persecute: to injure or harass (*They persecuted him because he was different.*)

prosecute: to proceed against by legal process (*They prosecuted her for assault.*)

practical: opposite of theoretical (*This is practical mechanics.*)

practicable: workable (*It's a practicable idea.*)

precede: to go before (*A precedes B.*)

proceed: to continue (*Proceed with the story.*)

stationary: fixed (*Is the fan stationary?*)

stationery: writing paper (*Use the proper stationery for business letters.*)

statue: a sculptured figure

stature: height (*Andrew's statue shows a man of great stature.*)

statute: written law (*This statute is irrelevant to our case.*)