



Common Confusing Words



Or Are They Commonly Confused?

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A good writer cares about words and their distinctions. As Mark Twain said, “The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.” The writer who uses “simplistic,” for example, when she means “simple” risks being labeled a simpleton. Referring to a comprehensive dictionary like *The American Heritage* is essential. Usage books, like *American Usage and Style: The Consensus*, edited by Roy Copperud, are also helpful tools for indicating the spread of opinion on points of usage. A thesaurus can be helpful when used to trigger a word already in your vocabulary. But simply plucking out a near-synonym can result in some disastrous prose because the word may not fit the context of your sentence. So use a thesaurus judiciously.

The sentences below present some pairs of commonly confused words. Test your sensitivity to the language by choosing the word that best completes the sentence. Answers are on the back of this sheet.

1. Conditions were (adverse/averse) to her undertaking.
2. She was (adverse/averse) to his proposal.
3. This (affected/effect)ed the entire course of events.
4. He (affected/effect)ed a stunning reversal.
5. How will this (affect/effect) you?
6. What is the (affect/effect) on you?
7. He made an (allusion/illusion) to Shakespeare.
8. Laser photography gives an (allusion/illusion) of reality.
9. She is (altogether/all together) convinced.
10. They were (altogether/all together) at the reunion.
11. They hoped to find one gem (among/between) all the applicants.
12. We had difficulty choosing (among/between) the two applicants.
13. We had the property (apprised/appraised).
14. She (apprised/appraised) us of the situation.
15. Her yawn revealed that she was (disinterested/uninterested).
16. Umpires should be (disinterested/uninterested) observers.
17. She tried unsuccessfully to (illicit/elicit) an answer.
18. He was arrested for engaging in (illicit/elicit) activity.
19. The writer (immigrated/emigrated) from his native country and gained status as an (immigrant, emigrant) in Mexico.
20. I would like to make one (farther/further) remark.
21. She could walk much (farther/further) than I.
22. An apple a day is (healthy/healthful).
23. An apple a day keeps you (healthy/healthful).
24. Her actions (implied/inferred) that she still liked him.
25. He (implied/inferred) from her actions that she liked him.
26. In his will he made (explicit/implicit) some provisions that had previously been left (explicit/implicit).
27. I have (laid/lain) in bed all day.
28. He (lay/laid) the book on the counter.
29. Pharmacists are (prescribed/proscribed) from (prescribing/proscribing) medicine without a license.
30. She was praised for her wit and her (simple/simplistic) style.
31. Her (simple/simplistic) answer ignored the complexities.
32. Many animals (comprise/constitute) a zoo.
33. A zoo (comprises/is comprised of) many animals.



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34. I want the car (irregardless/regardless) of its cost.
35. He had (less/fewer) men than in the previous campaign.
36. We spent the evening (like/as) in the old days.
37. She looks (like/as) her father.
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Answers:

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| 1. adverse | 13. appraised | 25. inferred |
| 2. averse | 14. apprised | 26. explicit; implicit |
| 3. affected | 15. uninterested | 27. lain |
| 4. effected | 16. disinterested | 28. laid |
| 5. affect | 17. elicit | 29. proscribed; prescribing |
| 6. effect | 18. illicit | 30. simple |
| 7. allusion | 19. emigrated; immigrant | 31. simplistic |
| 8. illusion | 20. further | 32. constitute |
| 9. altogether | 21. farther | 33. comprises |
| 10. all together | 22. healthful | 34. regardless |
| 11. among | 23. healthy | 35. fewer |
| 12. between | 24. implied | 36. as |
| 37. like | | |