farther, further In formal writing, farther suggests physical distance: *We had walked farther than anyone else.* Further suggests degree or progress in time: *The further I read, the angrier I got.* Less formally, the words are interchangeable, except when you mean “additional”: *It was clear that further surprises were in store.*

**Farther/Further**
- **Farther** is used for geographic distances.
  - Ten miles farther on is a hotel.
- **Further** means “in addition” when geography is not involved.
  - He said *farther* that he was annoyed with the play, the actors, and the stage.
  - The Department of State hired a new public relations expert so that further disasters could be more carefully explained to the press.

**Farther, further.** The first means distance; the second means time or figurative distance. You look *farther* and consider *further*.

**Farther, further** Generally interchangeable, though many persons prefer *farther* in expressions of physical distance and *further* in expressions of time, quantity, and degree.
- My car used less gasoline and went *farther* than his.
- The second speaker went *further* into the issues than the first.
- The *farther* speaker went further into the issues than the first.

**Farther, further** Used interchangeably. Some writers, however, prefer *farther* in references to geographic distance (as in “six miles *farther*”). *Further* is used as a synonym for *additional* in more abstract references (such as “without *further* delay,” “*further* proof”).

**Farthest, furthest** are the superlatives (not *fartherest, furtherest*).

**farther, further** Farther usually refers to distance, but *further* is often used in all possible senses. Many careful writers, however, restrict *further* to its abstract meaning: *I would like to make one further remark.* This has the advantage of leaving *farther* free to cover all occasions when physical distance is involved.

**Farther, further** In formal English *farther* is used to refer to physical distance: How much *farther* must we walk? *Further* refers to abstract degree: We will study these suggestions *further*. Although the distinction is not as strictly adhered to in general writing, it is better to maintain it.

**Farther, further** *Farther* refers to additional distance (*How much farther is it to the beach?*), and *further* refers to additional time, amount, or other abstract matters (*I don't want to discuss this any further*). The distinction often is blurred in current usage.

**Farther, further** *Further* refers to actual distance. *Farther* refers to additional time, amount, or other abstract matters. *I cannot walk any farther.* *Further* encouragement is useless.

**Farther, further** Some writers prefer to use *farther* to refer to distance and restrict *further* to mean “in addition” (*It was two miles farther to go the way you wished, but I wanted no further trouble*). Dictionaries recognize the forms as interchangeable.
farther/further. In contemporary usage, *farther* is preferred to express greater distance in space:

St. Louis is *farther* from New York than Cleveland is.
I won't carry this piano any *farther*.

In careful English, *further* is restricted to a sense of greater advancement in time or degree:

He is *further* along in graduate school than Mary is.
I won't carry this argument any *further*.

However, the two have become so freely interchangeable that many usage experts look upon *further* as simply a variant of *farther*, so that “St. Louis is *further* from New York than Cleveland is” would be acceptable to most people even for written English. Adjust to the taste of your audience in making a choice.

*farther, further*. The distinction between these words as adjectives has all but disappeared. In formal writing, however, some stylists insist on *farther* to designate distance and *further* to designate degree.

The Pioneer 10 Space Probe has traveled *farther* in space than any other man-made object.
Critics of the welfare system charge that government subsidies to the poor encourage *further* dependence.

Two uses of *further* are still very much with us. As a conjunctive adverb *further* means “besides.” As a transitive verb, *to further* means “to promote” or “to advance.”

Napoleon I was one of the greatest generals in history; *further*, he promoted liberalism through widespread legal reforms.
Tom Jones, the hero of Fielding's novel, was a poor boy who was able to *further* himself with luck and good looks.

*farther, further*. *Farther* usually is reserved for physical distance ("She threw the ball *farther* than anyone else"). *Further* for all other uses ("That explanation couldn't be *further* from the truth").
few, less Few suggests countable items; few trees. Less suggests items measured by volume or degree: less water, less heat.

fewer, less Fewer refers to numbers, less to amounts, degree, or value (We sold fewer tickets than last year, but our expenses were less).

fewer, less. Use fewer with countable items (Louise has fewer hats than Emily does). Use less when speaking of mass or bulk (Elmer has less sand in his garden than Andrew does). See amount of, number of.

fewer, less Fewer refers to individual countable items (a plural noun). Less to general amounts (a singular noun): Skim milk has fewer calories than whole milk. We have less milk left than I thought.

fewer, less Fewer is usually restricted to count nouns; less to mass nouns.

General: Fewer birds are now found in the swamps of Florida.

General: Less animosity toward the Establishment is apparent on campus today.

Casual: Less birds are now found in the swamps of Florida.

fewer, less Use fewer with nouns that can be counted: fewer books, fewer people, fewer dollars. Use less with quantities that cannot be counted: less pain, less power, less enthusiasm. (Note: Never use the phrase “less people.”)

Fewer young families than ever can afford the high interest rates on home mortgages.

Sufferers of arthritis often take large quantities of aspirin so they will have less pain.

Wrong, few. Do not use one for the other. Less answers “How much?” Few answers “How many?”

Wrong We had less people than last. We had fewer people this time than last.

Fewer, less. Fewer is used to refer to countable items, less to something considered as a mass:

If there are fewer people, it means less work for the clean-up crew.

fewer, less Informally used interchangeably in the sense of “not many.” Formally, fewer refers to numbers (how many), and less refers to amount, extent, or collective quantity (how much).

fewer seeds fewer hours fewer than twenty students
less seed less time less than $7,500 a year

Fewer, less Fewer refers to items that can be counted. Less refers to a collective quantity that cannot be counted. The marsh has fewer ducks living in it, but it also has less water to support them.

Fewer, less Use fewer to denote number; less, to denote amount or degree.

With fewer advertisers, there will also be less income from advertising.

Fewer/Less

See Amount/Number.

Fewer is the adjective for groups or collections whose parts can be counted individually; less is used for things in bulk not commonly considered collections of individual entities.

There were fewer people at commencement this year.

There is less substance to your argument than you think.
fewer, less, lesser, least  Fewer refers to numbers, less to amounts: fewer members, less revenue. Lesser is an adj. meaning minor or inferior: The lesser emissaries were excluded from the summit meeting. Least is the superlative of little; as an adj. it should only be used when more than two items are involved.

Fewer in number is red.

g, less. Use fewer for items that you can count: “If you have fewer spoons after a friend leaves your house, he should no longer be your friend.” Use less for degree or amount: “I have less money (fewer dollars).”
fine  Informal for *very well*, as in "did fine on that test." Use sparingly as a vague word of approval.

**Fine**  Often a poor substitute for a more exact word of approval or commendation.

fine  A weak substitute for *very well*.

fine  As an adjective to express approval (*a fine person*) *fine* is vague and overused. As an adverb meaning "well" (*works fine*) *fine* is colloquial.
Fix. The word means "to establish in place"; it means "to repair" only in speech or colloquial writing.

Fix Informal for the noun predicament.
Flaunt, flout. *Flaunt* means to parade, to wave impudently; *flout* means to scoff at. The first is metaphorical; the second, not:

"She *flaunted* her wickedness and *flouted* the police."

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**Flaunt/Flout**

*Flaunt* means to wave, to show publicly. It connotes a delight tinged with pride and even arrogance.

He *flaunted* his wealth by wearing overalls lined with mink.

*Flout* means to scorn or to defy, especially in a public way without seeming to care for the consequences.

He *flouted* the traffic laws by speeding, driving on the wrong side of the road, and running through a red light.

The suffragettes often *flouted* all the conventions accepted by women in their day, cutting their hair, wearing shorter dresses, and smoking cigarettes in public.

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**flaunt, flout.** *Flaunt* means "to show off something or act ostentatiously" ("Not only was the embezzler unashamed of his crimes, he actually *flaunted* them."). *Flout* means "to show disregard or contempt for" ("If he continues to *flout* the rules, he should go elsewhere."). When using either, make sure you know the difference in meanings.

**flaunt, flout** Widely confused. To *flaunt* is to display arrogantly: They *flaunted* their superior wisdom. To *flout* is to defy contemptuously: They *flouted* every rule of proper behavior.

**flaunt, flout.** Although frequently confused, these words are not synonyms: *flaunt* is to make a show of, or display something ostentatiously; *flout* is to disregard or treat with scorn:

Everyone was tired of the way he *flaunted* his inheritance.

Some people always *flout* the traffic laws.

**flaunt, flout** *Flaunt* means "show off": If you have style, *flaunt* it. *Flout* means "scorn" or "defy": Hester Prynne *flouted* convention and paid the price.
Folks. Use parents, mother and father, or family instead.

folks Informal for parents, relatives.

folks Colloquial for parents, relatives, or people.

folks Colloquial when used to mean relatives, and in the phrase just folks, meaning "unassuming, not snobbish." Standard in the sense of people in general, or of a specific group (folks differ, young folks).
former, formerly, formally  Former as an adjective means "preceding" or "previous." As a noun it means "the first of two things mentioned previously." It is often used in conjunction with latter.

The former residents of this area, the Delaware Indians, were forced to cede their land in 1795.

Two books mark the extremes of Herman Melville's career: Typee and Moby Dick. The former was a best seller; the latter was generally ignored by the public.

Formerly means "just before" or "in a time past."

Formerly, tonality, as it evolved in the seventeenth century, was considered the natural law in music.

Formally means "ceremonially" or "in a manner required by convention."

Before assuming their duties, ambassadors have their credentials formally accepted by the president.

former, latter  Former refers to the first-named of two things, latter to the second-named: I like both skiing and swimming, the former in the winter and the latter all year round. To refer to the first- or last-named of three or more things, say first or last: I like jogging, swimming, and hang gliding, but the last is inconvenient in the city.

former/latter  Former—the first-mentioned item; latter—the second-mentioned item. They should be used only when there can be no confusion about which item in the preceding context each refers to.

When it came to apples and oranges, he preferred the former, but liked the latter also.

Because of a tendency to mispronounce latter, it is often misspelled as ladder. Also, avoid confusing it with later.

Later, if you have a choice between walking in front of a truck or under a ladder, choose the latter.

former, latter. Avoid, where possible. When you use them, you make your reader hunt back through the sentence or paragraph looking for the first thing, and then the second one; after which he has to find the place where you interrupted him with former or latter. Using either is seldom worth the trouble.

former, latter. Used to refer to the first or last of two items only:

Ivan and Ken approached. The former was my strongest supporter, the latter my opponent.

If there are more than two items, use first, last.

former, latter  Former refers to the first-named of two; latter refers to the last-named of two. First and last are used to refer to one of a group of more than two.
POOR
The Athenians and Spartans were always in conflict. The former had a better civilization; the latter had a better army.

IMPROVED
The Athenians and Spartans were always in conflict. Athens had the better culture; Sparta, the better army.

former Refers to the first named of two. If three or more items are named, use first and last instead of former or latter.

The Folger and the Huntington are two famous libraries; the former is in Washington, D.C., and the latter is in San Marino, California.

former, latter When there are only two items, formal writing prefers former and latter instead of first and last: We elected Benson and Cheney, the former a biologist, and the latter a chemist.

former, latter These formal-sounding terms should be used only when there are two items and when the reader will have no difficulty identifying them: you shouldn't use them after intricate constructions. Note that each item can be plural:
The admirals and generals flatly disagreed; the latter prevailed.

When former means ex-, don't combine it with ex- (a former ex-nun) or use it with a past v. (She was a former nun) if the person is still alive.

former, latter Former refers to the first named of two things or people. Latter refers to the second of two named. First and last are used to refer to items in a series of three or more: John and Bill are very successful; the former is a dentist, the latter a poet. Jogging, hiking, and swimming require tremendous endurance; the last requires the most.

Former/Latter
These words can only refer to one of two persons or things—in sequence, named first, named last.

John saw Star Wars and The Empire Strikes Back. He liked the former better than the latter.

If you are speaking of three or more things, use first and last.

Guy's closest friends were Paul, Curtis, and Ricco. The first was Greek, the second was English, and the third was Italian.

CAUTION: All these terms can be confusing, and it is usually better not to use them.

John saw Star Wars and The Empire Strikes Back. He liked Star Wars better.
Fun. Fun thing, fun time, fun party—all popular jargon. Keep fun as a noun: “It was fun.” Or try something more vivid and original: “The party was hilarious from start to finish.”

fun. Informal if used adjectivally, as in “a fun person,” “a fun car.”

fun. Nonstandard adjective for enjoyable, pleasant.

fun. Colloq. as an adj.: a fun affair.

fun. Never use it as an adjective: “fun time,” “fun person,” “fun course.”
**good, well.** Good is ordinarily an adjective: "a good child," "She is good." Do not use it in this fashion: "She shoveled coal good." Rather, use the adverb well: "She shoveled it well." Good and well have a complex relationship; check your dictionary if you are unsure of a particular usage.

**good, well.** Good is an adjective: a good time; this cake tastes good. Well is either an adjective, in the sense of one's health, or, more usually, an adverb: The team plays well together. Since good is an adjective, it shouldn't be used in place of the adverb well: The car is running well since it was tuned up.

**good, well** Good is colloquial as an adverb (The motor runs well [not good]). You look good means "You look attractive, well dressed," or the like. You look well means "You look healthy."

**Good/Well**

*Good* is an adjective; *well* is an adverb except when it refers to good health in which case it is an adjective. Avoid confusing them.

- I felt good after the doctor told me that I looked well. [Both good and well are adjectives in this sentence.]
- She did well on the exam. [Well is an adverb.]
- He hit the that ball real good. [Here, good tries to masquerade incorrectly as an adverb.]

**good, well** You look good tonight means that you're attractive. You look well tonight means that you don't look sick.
Good, well. *He done real good—75 percent wrong for written communication,* as a young English instructor in Texas said, turning in his first batch of papers, with his contract, and becoming a librarian. *Good is the adjective; good time. Well is the adverb: well done.* In verbs of feeling, we are caught in the ambiguities of health. *I feel good* is more accurate than *I feel well,* because *well* may mean that your feelers are in good order. But *I feel well* is also an honest statement: "I feel that I am well." Ask yourself what your readers might misunderstand from your statements, and you will use these two confused terms clearly.

**Good** Incorrect as an adverb. See p. 76.

**good, well** Use *good* to mean "attractive, promising": *This looks good to me.* Use *well* to describe actions: *The motor runs well.* She writes *well.* To describe state of health or general condition, use *well:* *You seem to feel well.*

**good** Informal if used adverbially.

INFORMAL Watson plays good under pressure.

GENERAL Watson plays well under pressure.

good, well Good is an adjective, and *well* is nearly always an adverb: *Larry's a good dancer. He and Linda dance well together.* *Well* is properly used as an adjective only to refer to health: *You don't look well. Aren't you feeling well? (You look good, in contrast, means 'Your appearance is pleasing'.)*

good, well Good is an adjective, never an adverb.

The townspeople thought the proposal for a new municipal water plant was *good.*

*Well* can function as an adverb and an adjective. As an adverb it means "in a good manner." In slang expressions, such as "He did good on the test" or "She swam good in the meet," *good* is wrong. Correct usage requires "He did well on the test" and "She swam well in the meet."

*Well* is used as an adjective with verbs that denote a state of being or feeling. Here *well* can mean "in good health": "I feel well." If you mean that your sense of feeling is acute, however, "my feeling is good" leaves no ambiguity.

good, well Good is an adjective; *well* is an adverb. *Dr. Hodge is a good golfer. He strokes the ball well.* *Well* should be used to refer to health: *You look well [not good]. Are you feeling well [not good]?*
great Overworked informally for skillful, good, clever, enthusiastic, or very well, as in "really great at guessing the answers" or "with everything going great for us."

Great Informal for first-rate.
had ought, hadn't ought Nonstandard for ought, should not. You ought [not had ought] to have that lanced. They should not [not hadn't ought to] light matches near the oil cuts.

had ought/hadn't ought Had ought and hadn't ought are common colloquialisms. In most writing situations, ought to have or ought not to have are preferred.

General: You ought not to have done that.
Casual, dialogue particularly: You hadn't ought to have done that.

had ought, hadn't ought Nonstandard for ought and ought not.

had ought, hadn't ought. These forms are nonstandard. Had should be eliminated from each of them: I ought to go; I ought not to go.

had ought The had is unnecessary and should be omitted: He ought (not had ought) to listen to his mother.

had ought, hadn't ought Nonstandard for ought, ought not or oughtn't.

had ought, hadn't ought Nonstandard for ought and ought not.
Hanged, hung.  *Hanged* is the past of *hang* only for the death penalty.  

They hung the rope and hanged the man.

*hanged, hung* Informally interchangeable in the sense of "put to death by hanging." Formally, it is *hanged* (often used figuratively nowadays) that refers to such an act.

Whenever my parents supplied enough rope, I usually hanged myself—but not always.

*hanged, hung* *Hanged* means "executed by hanging": *The stranger was hanged for horse stealing. Hung* means "suspended": *She hung the crossbow in her locker.*

hanged, hung  People are hanged by the neck until dead. Pictures and all other things that can be suspended are hung.

hanged, hung  Criminals aren’t hanged very often now, but grammarians still insist on this p.p. While the distinction lasts, you should observe it: *hanged* is for executions, *hung* for all other uses of *hang.*

hanged, hung  Both hanged and hung are past participles of *hang.* *Hanged* is used to refer to executions. *Hung* is used in all other senses meaning "suspended" or "held up."

Billy Budd was hanged from the mainyard of the ship for killing the master-at-arms. The pictures in the National Gallery are hung to take advantage of the natural lighting in the various rooms.

hanged, hung  Though both are past-tense forms of *hang*, *hanged* is used to refer to executions and *hung* is used for all other meanings: *Tom Dooley was hanged (not hung) from a white oak tree. I hung (not hanged) the picture you gave me.*

*hanged, hung* The principal parts of the verb are *hang, hung, hung,* but when referring to death by hanging, formal English uses *hang, hanged, hanged* (*We hung the pictures. The prisoners hanged themselves.*)
His/her, his (her). Shift to the neutral plural, or otherwise rephrase to avoid this awkwardness. His stands for both sexes, if you can stand it.

he or she Write he or she when referring to a generic or hypothetical individual who could be either male or female. The researcher should work until he or she begins to see a pattern in the data. A better alternative is to write in the plural. Researchers should work until they begin to see a pattern in the data.

he, she; he/she Many people today object to the use of he to mean he or she because nearly all readers think of he as male, whether or not that is the writer’s intention. He/she, one substitute for he, is awkward and objectionable to most readers. The better choice is to make he plural, to use he or she, or to rephrase. For instance, After the infant learns to crawl, he progresses to creeping might be rewritten as follows: After infants learn to crawl, they progress to creeping. After the infant learns to crawl, he or she progresses to creeping. After learning to crawl, the infant progresses to creeping.

he, she Traditionally he has been used in the generic sense to refer to both males and females.

Before registering, each student should be sure he has received his student number.

You can acknowledge equality of both sexes by avoiding the generic he. Efforts in the direction of a new neutral pronoun have not caught on. And constructions such as “he or she” or “he/she” are cumbersome, especially when used a number of times in a paragraph. To avoid problems, use the second person singular or first and third person plural pronouns when possible.

Traditional Before registering, each student should be sure he has received his student number.

Revision Before registering, you should receive your student number.

Revision Before registering, we should receive our student numbers.

Revision Before registering, students should receive their student numbers.

his/her, his or her. The use of such pronouns to refer to both males and females in a group (“Each student should get his or her grades next week.”) is usually awkward, especially when repeated several times in a short span. As William Watt remarked, these “awkward straddlers . . . suggest legal documents or towels and cocktail glasses for newlyweds.” (See p. 352 for more advice on this vexing problem.)
he or she. Although he has traditionally been used as the pronoun when both sexes are meant, more writers are using he or she (him or her, his or her). If constant repetition of he or she sounds awkward, try rewriting the passage into the plural (they).
Hopefully. An inaccurate dangler, a cliché. "Hopefully, they are at work" does not mean that they are working hopefully. Simply use "I hope": not "They are a symbol of idealism, and, hopefully, are representative," but "They are a symbol of idealism and are, I hope, representative."

**hopefully** Still questionable for it is hoped.

hopefully. Hopefully means "with hope": Freddy waited hopefully for a glimpse of Eliza. The use of hopefully to mean "it is to be hoped," "I hope," or "let's hope" is now very common; but since many readers continue to object strongly to the usage, you should avoid it. I hope (not Hopefully) Eliza will be here soon.

hopefully. The adverb hopefully should modify a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Increasingly, however, hopefully is being used as a sentence modifier, even over strong objections. To be safe and unambiguous, use hopefully in its traditional sense.

Ambiguous. Hopefully, scientists will find an alternative energy source by the end of the century. (Who is hopeful? Scientists or the writer?)

Revised. Scientists hope they will find an alternative energy source by the end of the century.

Here is an acceptable use of hopefully.

During the 1930s many of the nation's jobless looked hopefully to the federal government for relief. ("Hopefully" modifies "looked.")

**hopefully.** Few clichés irritate more people today than this "floating adverb" tied to the front of a sentence: "Hopefully, the new rule will help us do a better job." Two suggestions:

a. Tie the word to what it modifies:

She said **hopefully** that the new rule will help . . . . (This means she said it hopefully, that is, in a hopeful tone.)

b. Identify the person(s) being hopeful:

She **hoped** that the new rule . . . .
They **hoped** that the new rule . . . .
McTavish **hoped** that the new rule . . . .

**hopefully.** Hopefully means "with hope." They prayed hopefully for the blizzard to stop. Hopefully is used colloquially to mean "it is hoped" in place of I hope; however, I hope is preferred in college and business writing. I hope (rather than hopefully) the blizzard will stop.
Many people resent the use of *hopefully* to mean it is hoped; they remember that until recently it meant only in a hopeful manner. A majority of readers do accept the new meaning, but you should keep the others in mind.

Many readers object to *hopefully* when it is used to modify an entire sentence: *Hopefully, we will arrive in time.* It may help to remember that *hopefully* means with hope. Compare these sentences:

- We watched hopefully as the debris was cleared.
- We hoped some survivors would be found. [not *Hopefully, some survivors would be found.*]

*Hopefully* means "in a hopeful manner" (*They waited hopefully for money*). It is now widely used in the sense of "it is hoped" (*Hopefully, you can send me money*). Some readers object to this use.

**Hopefully**

Since the 1960s, *hopefully* has come into common use as an adverb modifying an entire sentence. Usually, adverbs modify only verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs, although there are exceptions to this practice. Many careful writers and speakers object to *hopefully* as a modifier of an entire sentence because it does not tell who has the hope, it is usually uneconomical, and it may be confusing.

*Hopefully* Franklin will play poker tonight.

[Does this sentence mean that Franklin will play poker with hope in his heart? Who has the hope, Franklin or the other players who hope to win his money? Or perhaps the hope is held by someone who yearns for Franklin to be out of the house this evening.]

*I hope* Franklin is going to play poker tonight.

Franklin *hopes* to play poker tonight.

All his gambling friends *hope* that Franklin will play poker with them tonight.

[In these sentences, the source of the hope is identified, confusion is eliminated, and economy is preserved.]
Imply/Infer

To *imply* means to suggest something without stating it directly; to *infer* means to draw a conclusion from evidence.

By pouring hot coffee on his head, she *implied* that he should stop singing.

When she dozed off in the middle of his declaration of love for her, he *inferred* that she was not going to marry him.

**Imply, infer**

*Imply* means "suggest." *Infer* means "conclude." Irving *implied* that he had studied for the quiz, but I *inferred* that he was unprepared.

**Imply, infer**

*Imply* means "to hint" or "to suggest." *Infer* means "to conclude from." When you *imply*, you *send out* a suggestion; when you *infer*, you *receive* or draw a conclusion. You should maintain this distinction in your writing.

Mark Antony *implied* that Brutus and the other conspirators had wrongfully killed Julius Caesar.

The crowd *inferred* his meaning and called for the punishment of the conspirators.

**Imply, infer**

Widely confused, *with infer* often used where only *imply* would be right. To *imply* is properly to leave an implication; to *infer* is to take one. She *implied* that she was still loyal to him, but she *inferred* otherwise from her embarrassed manner.

**Imply, infer**

The speaker or writer *implies* ("Wilkens implied that he was going to quit."); the hearer or reader *infers* ("I inferred from his remark that he was going to quit."). When you put forth an idea, you may also put forth implications; when you guess or interpret the ideas of others, you draw inferences.

**Imply, infer**

*Imply* means "to hint" or "suggest"; *infer* means "to draw a conclusion."

The speaker *implied* that Mr. Dixon was guilty.

The audience *inferred* that Mr. Dixon was guilty.

**Infer, imply**

*Imply* means "to suggest." He *claims to be innocent.

but the facts *imply* otherwise. *Infer* means "to deduce": From this evidence we *infer* that someone else was in the room.

**Imply, infer.**

*Imply* means "suggest"; *infer* means "assume" or "draw a conclusion" from a suggestion or implication:

Even though she didn't say anything, her expression implied that she thought her friend was acting foolishly.

We *inferred* from the manager's remarks that we would not be getting raises this year.

**Imply, infer.**

The author *implies*; you *infer* ("carry in") what you think he means.

He *implied* that all women were hypocrites.

From the ending, we *infer* that tragedy ennobles as it kills.
**imply, infer**. There is a definite difference in meaning between these two verbs. **imply** means "to hint at," "to suggest" (She implied that she wouldn't come to his party). **infer** means "to deduce," "to draw a conclusion from" (He inferred from the look on her face that she wouldn't come to his party).

**imply, infer** Used interchangeably as synonyms for hint at, inti­
mate, suggest. Most writers, however, carefully distinguish be­
tween infer (meaning "draw a conclusion based on evidence") and
imply ("suggest without actually stating").

His attitude implies that money is no problem.
I infer from his attitude that money is no problem.

**imply, infer** To imply means to suggest without stating; to infer means to draw a conclusion. Speakers imply; listeners infer (They implied that I was ungrateful; I inferred that they didn't like me).

Writers or speakers imply, meaning "suggest": Jim's letter implies he's having too good a time to miss us. Readers or listeners infer, meaning "conclude": From Jim's letter I infer he's having too good a time to miss us.
Ingenious, ingenuous  
*Ingenious* means "clever"; *ingenuous* means "naive". (Inventors are usually ingenious, but some are too ingenuous to know when they have been cheated.)

Ingenious, ingenuous  
*Ingenious* means "clever, resourceful"; *ingenuous* means "open, frank," "artless."

This electric can opener is an *ingenious* device. 
Don's *ingenuous* smile disarms the critics.

Ingenious, ingenuous  
*Ingenious* means "clever at inventing or organizing." *Ingenious* means "open" or "artless."

Ludwig van Beethoven is recognized as one of the most ingenious composers who ever lived. 
For a politician the mayor was surprisingly ingenious.

Ingenious, ingenuous  
*Ingenious* means "clever"; *ingenuous* means "naive, innocent": You are an *ingenuous* child. You will never be able to resist their ingenious maneuvers.

Ingenious, ingenuous. Sometimes confused. *Ingenious* means clever; *ingenuous*, naive.
regardless, irregardless

Irregardless is a nonstandard version of regardless. The suffix "less" means "without" or "free from," so the prefix "ir-" is unnecessary.

Slang Irregardless of what some people might think, drunk drivers kill more than twenty-five thousand people a year.

Revised Regardless of what some people might think, drunk drivers kill more than twenty-five thousand people a year.

irregardless Nonstandard for regardless.

irregardless A colloquial form of regardless; avoid in most writing.

General: Regardless of the situation, you were wrong.

Casual, dialogue only: Irregardless of the situation, you were wrong.

Irregardless

This is a nonstandard form of regardless. The construction irregardless is a double negative, since both the prefix ir- and the suffix -less are negatives.

irregardless Nonstandard for regardless.

irregardless Nonstandard for regardless.

irregardless Nonstandard for regardless.

irregardless Nonstandard for regardless. Since both ir- and -less are negative affixes, ir- is redundant.

Irregardless. A faulty word. The ir- (meaning not) is doing what the -less already does. You are thinking of irrespective, and trying to say regardless.

irregardless. Never use; always write regardless.

irregardless Nonstandard. They continued to work on the bomb re- gardless [not irregardless] of the danger to themselves.
its, it's  It's means "it is" or "it has": It's now twelve o'clock. Its is the possessive form of it. The surface of the table has lost its shine.

its, it's  The possessive pronoun has no apostrophe. It's is a contraction of it is.

its, it's  Its is a possessive pronoun: That plant is losing its leaves. Its is a contraction for it is: It's likely to die if you don't water it. Many people confuse it's and its because possessives are most often formed with -'s; but its in the possessive sense, like his and hers, never takes an apostrophe.

its, it's  Its is a possessive pronoun. It's is a contraction of it is. Watch this distinction, and do not use these words interchangeably.

The most obvious characteristic of a modern corporation is the separation of its management from its ownership. It's not often that you can see a collection of rare books such as the one housed in the Library of Congress.

its, it's  Its is the possessive case of the pronoun it; it's is a contraction of it is or it has.

It's exciting to parents when their baby cuts its first tooth.

its, it's  Its is a possessive pronoun ("for its beauty"). It's is a contraction of it is ("It's beautiful") or of it has ("It's been a beautiful day").

It's/its  It's is commonly the contraction for it is; sometimes it is a contraction for it has. Its is a possessive pronoun.

It's clear that its paint is peeling. It's often been said that English grammar is difficult.

its, it's  These two words are often carelessly confused. Its is the possessive form of the pronoun it: everything in its place. It's is the contraction for it is or it has. It's raining; It's begun. There is no such form as its'.

The possessive pronoun has no apostrophe. It's is a contraction of it is.
-ize The suffix -ize is one of several used to form verbs from nouns and adjectives (hospitalize, criticize, sterilize). Writers in government, business, and other institutions have often used it excessively and unnecessarily in such coinages as finalize, concretize, permunize. Such coinages are widely objected to; it is best to limit your use of -ize words to those that are well established, and resist the temptation to coin new ones.

-ize, -wise The suffix -ize is frequently used to change a noun or adjecti- tive into a verb: revolutionize, immunize. The suffix -wise commonly changes a noun into an adjective: clockwise, otherwise, like­wise. But the two suffixes are used excessively and often unnecessarily, especially in bureaucratic writing. Avoid their use except in established words: The two nations are ready to settle on (not finalize) an agreement. I'm highly sensitive (not sensitized) to that kind of criticism. From a finan­ cial standpoint (not Moneywise), it's a good time to buy real estate.

-ize A handy way to make verbs from nouns and adjectives (pa­ tron-ize, civil-ize). But handle with care. Manufacture new -izes only with a sense of humor and daring ("they Harvardized the party"). Business overdoes the trick: finalize, a relative newcomer, has provoked strong disapproval from writers who are not commercially familiarized.

-ize Be wary of new words coined by adding -ize to a noun or adjective: prioritize, sensitize. However, many words ending in -ize are familiar and acceptable: criticize, categorize, publicize.

-ize, -wise The suffix -ize is used to change nouns and adjectives into verbs: "civlize," "industrialize," "Westernize," "immunize." The suffix -wise is used to change a noun or adjective into an adverb: "likewise," "otherwise." Unfortunately, business, advertising, and government people, along with professional educators, use these suffixes carelessly, making up words as they please: "final­ ize," "prioritize," "taste-wise," "weather-wise," and "policy-wise," for example. Be sure to look up suspect -ize and -wise words in the dictionary to make sure that they are accepted usages.

-ize New verbs made from nouns plus -ize continually appear, and some of them will eventually be accepted as S.E. This has already happened to editorialize, hospitalize, and socialize, for example. Others, like finalize and randomize, are used widely in certain quarters but are regarded as jarg. elsewhere. Stay away from them in essay prose, and don't invent -izes of your own.

-ize Many -ize words are rejected by serious writers as pretentious invented terms (neologisms): prioritize (to set priorities), finalize (to make final). However, the linguistic principle is well established: alphabetize, authorize, systematize, theorize. Avoid inventing words in formal writing.
kind of, sort of  Informal when used adverbially in the sense of “to a degree, somewhat, a bit” or “in a way” (as in “kind of silly,” “sort of hesitated,” or “kind of enjoying it”).

Kind of, sort of. Colloquialisms for somewhat, rather, something, and the like. “It is kind of odd” will not get by. But “It is a kind of academic hippopotamus” will get by nicely, because a kind of means a species of. Change “a kind of a poor sport” to “a kind of poor sport,” and you will seem as knowledgeable as a scientist.

kind of, sort of In formal writing, kind and sort are singular and are followed by singular phrases: kind of book, sort of plant. The plurals for the examples are kinds of books and sorts of plants.

Kind of, sort of Informal as adverbs: use rather, somewhat, and so forth.

INFORMAL
Mr. Josephson was sort of disgusted.

FORMAL
Mr. Josephson was rather disgusted.

FORMAL (not an adverb)
What sort of book is that?

kind of, sort of, type of In formal speech and writing, avoid using kind of or sort of to mean “somewhat”: He was rather (not kind of) tall.

Kind, sort, and type are singular and take singular modifiers and verbs: This kind of dog is easily trained. Agreement errors often occur when these singular nouns are combined with the plural demonstrative adjectives these and those: These kinds (not kind) of dogs are easily trained. Kind, sort, and type should be followed by of but not by a: I don’t know what type of (not type or type of a) dog that is.

Use kind of, sort of, or type of only when the word kind, sort, or type is important: That was a strange (not strange sort of) statement. He’s a funny (not funny kind of) guy.

kind of, sort of Kind of and sort of to mean “rather” or “somewhat” are colloquial and should not appear in college writing.

Colloquial The countess was surprised to see that Napoleon was kind of short.

Revised The countess was surprised to see that Napoleon was rather short.

Reserve kind of and sort of for occasions when you categorize.

Willie Stark, a character in Robert Penn Warren’s All the King’s Men, is the kind of man who begins by meaning well and ends by being corrupted by his success.

kind of, sort of Colloquial when used to mean somewhat, rather (I was rather [not kind of] pleased).

kind of, sort of Colloquial when used to mean somewhat or rather. The picnic was rather [not sort of] dull.

kind of a, sort of a. Although frequently occurring in speech, kind of a is considered informal in writing. Write: We’ll never see that kind of day again.
kind of, sort of, type of When used at all, these expressions should be followed by the sing.: this kind of woman. But such a woman is preferable.

Sort of and kind of are awk. in the sense of somewhat, and they sometimes appear in the unnecessary form sort of a, kind of a: x He was an odd sort of a king. Don't use sort and kind unless your sentence needs them to make sense. If He was an odd king will do, there's no reason to drag in sort or kind. A legitimate example is This kind of bike has been on the market for only three months.

kind of, sort of. Do not use the article a or an with either of these phrases (He suffered some kind of a heart attack. She got the sort of an ovation she deserved). Kind of and sort of in the sense of "rather" or "somewhat" (He was kind of annoyed with his teacher) should be reserved for an informal or a colloquial context.
kind, sort Singular forms, which may be modified by this or that. The use of these or those is increasingly common but is still questionable.

QUESTIONABLE These kind of arguments are deceptive.

PREFERRED These kinds of arguments are deceptive.

OR This kind of argument is deceptive.

kind, sort, type These are singular words and take singular modifiers and verbs. This kind of butterfly is rare in North America. When referring to more than one thing, kind, sort, and type must be made plural and then take plural modifiers and verbs. These kinds of butterflies are rare in North America.

kind, sort These are frequently treated as plural in such constructions as these kind of books and those sort of dogs. Preferred usage in both speech and writing requires singular or plural throughout the construction, as in this kind of book or these kinds of books.

kind, sort Kind and sort are singular when used with this or that and should be used with a singular noun and verb: this kind of book is my favorite, that sort of person annoys me. If the idea is plural, use these and those: these kinds of books are . . . , those sorts of people . . . .
later, latter  Comparative forms of late often confused in writing. In modern English, later (like sooner) refers to time; latter (like former) refers to one of two—or the second one (but not to the last of several).

We set a later date. They arrived later than usual.
She wrote a song and a play. The latter won a prize.

See also former.

later, latter  Later refers to time; latter refers to the second-named of two items. See former, latter.

later, latter. Later, a comparative adjective, refers to time: The later the hour, the longer the shadows. Latter, an adjective or a noun, refers to the second of two items named. See also former latter.
Lead, led  Lead is an incorrect form for the past tense led.

lead, led  The verb lead (rhymes with “feed”) means to “guide” or “direct.” As a noun, lead (rhymes with “bed”) denotes a metal.

You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.

For centuries alchemists searched for the formula that would enable them to change lead into gold.

Led (also rhymes with “bed”) is the past tense and the past participle form of the verb lead.

The remarkable Indian woman Sacajawea led the Lewis and Clark expedition across the high Rocky Mountains.
learn, teach. The student learns, the instructor teaches. Using learn for teach is considered nonstandard.

Learn, teach
Learn means "acquire knowledge." Teach means "dispense knowledge." I must teach [not learn] the children better manners.

Learn, teach
Learn means "to take in knowledge"; teach means "to give knowledge." In theory, students learn and teachers teach. She taught [not learned] us the alphabet.

Learn, teach
To learn means "to gain knowledge"; to teach means "to give knowledge" (We learn from experience; experience teaches us much).

Learn, teach
Learn means "to acquire knowledge." Teach means "to impart knowledge."
She could not learn how to work the problem until Mrs. Smithers taught her the formula.

Nonstandard for teach, instruct, inform.

NOT That'll learn him!
BUT That'll teach him!
leave Nonstandard for permit or let: Will you let (not leave) me do it?

leave, let Leave means "go away." Let means "allow" or "permit." Let [not leave] me finish the job. The firm should have let [not left] her resign.

leave, let To leave is to depart; to let is to permit or allow (I must leave now. Will you let me go?)

leave, let Have different senses in clauses like leave him alone and let him alone. The first means get out of his presence; the second means don't bother him (even if you remain in his presence).

leave Nonstandard for let except when followed by an object and alone, as in "Leave [or Let] them alone."

NONSTANDARD He won't leave me go now.
STANDARD He won't let me go now. [or let me leave]

NONSTANDARD Leave us not protest too much.
STANDARD Let us not protest too much.

leave, let Leave means "to go away from" or "to let remain." Let means "to allow" or "to permit."

Many missionaries were forced to leave China after the Communist revolution in 1948.
As the liquid boils away, it will leave a dark brown precipitate at the bottom of the flask.
In London it is illegal to let dogs foul the footpath.

leave, let Leave and let are interchangeable only when followed by alone; leave me alone is the same as let me alone. Otherwise, leave means "depart" and let means "allow": Julia would not let Susan leave.
**lie, lay**  
*Lie* is an intransitive verb (one that does not take an object) that means "to recline." *Lay* is a transitive verb meaning "to put" or "to place."

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Each afternoon she would *lie* in the sun and listen to the surf.  

As *I Lay Dying* is a book by William Faulkner.  

In 1871 Heinrich Schliemann unearthed the city of Troy that had *lain* undisturbed for two thousand years.  

The painting *Odalisque* by Eugène Delacroix shows a nude *lying* on a couch.

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The Federalist Papers *lay* the foundation for the American conservative movement.  

In October of 1781 the British *laid* down their arms and surrendered to George Washington at Yorktown.  

After he had *laid* his money on the counter, he walked out of the restaurant.  

Amish stone masons are capable of *laying* a wall without using mortar.

**Lie/Lay**

*Lie* means to recline; *lay* means to place.  

- I am going to *lie* down to sleep.  
- He said he would *lay* the clothes carefully on the bed.

Part of the confusion in the way we use *lie* and *lay* comes because the principal parts of the verbs are confusing. Study the following sentences:

- I often *lie* awake at night.  
- He *lay* on his stomach for a long time and listened intently.  
- He had *lain* there for an hour before he heard the horses.  
- He will *lay* the bricks in a straight line.  
- She *laid* her book on the steps and left it there.  
- He had *laid* away money for years to prepare for his retirement.

**lay, lie**  
*To lay* means "to place, put down" (*Lay the book on the table*).  
*To lie* means "to recline" (*The dog lies on the floor*).  

See 4c.

**lie, lay**  
The past tense of *lie* is *lay*: *Today I lie in bed; yesterday I lay [not laid] in bed all day.*  
See 11d.
lend, loan Some writers prefer to keep lend as a v. and loan as a n.; but loan can also be a v. Loan as a v. is most often seen in past forms: I loaned it to her.

lend, loan. The conservative position is that loan should be used exclusively as a noun (He took out a loan from the bank) and that lend should be used exclusively as a verb (The bank lends him the downpayment).

Lend, loan. Don't use loan for lend. Lend is the verb, loan, the noun: "Please lend me a five; I need a loan badly." Remember the line from the song: "I'll send you to a friend who'll be willing to lend."
lie (lying, lay, lain)  Nonstandard for lay (laying, laid) in the sense of "put, place." See also 7a(2).

NONSTANDARD STANDARD
Onion slices are then lain on the fillets. Onion slices are then laid on the fillets.
NONSTANDARD STANDARD
Last night I lay my homework aside. Last night I laid my homework aside.

lay (laying, laid) Nonstandard for lie (lying, lay, lain) meaning "to rest or recline." See also 7a(2).

NONSTANDARD STANDARD
I did lay down awhile. Had he laid down? The truck was laying on its side.
NONSTANDARD STANDARD
After lunch, I laid down awhile. [past of lie]

lay, lie  Lay is a transitive verb (principal parts lay, laid, laid) that means "put" or "place": it is nearly always followed by a direct object. If we lay this tablecloth in the sun next to the shirt Sandy laid out there this morning, it should dry quickly. Lie is an intransitive verb (principal parts lie, lay, lain) that means "recline" or "be situated": I lay awake all night last night, just as I had lain the night before. The town lies east of the river. See also 7b.

Lay. Don't use lay to mean lie. Lay means "to put" and needs an object; lie means "to recline." Memorize both their present and past tenses, which are frequently confused:

I lie down when I can; I lay down yesterday; I have lain down often. [Intransitive, no object.]
The hen lays an egg; she laid one yesterday; she has laid four this week. [Transitive, lays an object.]
Now I lay the book on the table; I laid it there yesterday; I have laid it there many times.

lie, lay If nothing more than repose is intended, the intransitive lie is the right word: I lie down. The transitive lay means, among other things, set: lay it here.
The past forms of these verbs are troublesome. All of the following sentences are correct:

lie, lay  Lie (past tense lay, past participle lain) is an intransitive verb meaning "to rest," "to recline" (The book lies on the table. It has lain there for three days). Lay (past tense laid, past participle laid) is a transitive verb (i.e. must be followed by an object) meaning "to put down" (She lays the book on the table. Yesterday she laid the book on the mantelpiece).

lay, lie  Lay is a verb meaning "to put or place"; it takes an object: Lay the books on the desk. Lie is a verb meaning "to recline"; it does not take an object: Lie down for a nap. The principal parts of lay are lay, laid, laid: He laid the books on the desk. The principal parts of lie are lie, lay, lain: She lay down for a nap.

lie, lay These verbs are often confused. Lie means "recline," and lay means "place." In part, they seem to be confusing because the past tense of lie is the same as the present tense of lay.

lie ("recline") lay ("place")
lie lay
lay laid
lain laid
lying laying

Lay (meaning "place") is also a transitive verb and as such takes an object. Don't forget to lay the book on my desk. Today I laid the tile, and tomorrow I'll be laying the carpet. Lie (meaning "recline") is intransitive and as such never takes an object. The book lay on my desk for weeks. I can't waste time lying in bed; I've lain there long enough.
**Lie, lay**

Lie is an intransitive verb (one that does not take an object) that means "to recline." Lay is a transitive verb meaning "to put" or "to place."

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Part of the confusion in the way we use *lie* and *lay* comes because the principal parts of the verbs are confusing. Study the following sentences:

- I often *lie* awake at night. [present]
- He *lay* on his stomach for a long time and listened intently. [past]
- He had *lain* there for an hour before he heard the horses. [past participle]
- He will *lay* the bricks in a straight line. [present]
- She *laid* her book on the steps and left it there. [past]
- He had *laid* away money for years to prepare for his retirement. [past participle]

*lay, lie* To *lay* means "to place, put down" (*Lay* the book on the table). To *lie* means "to recline" (*The dog lies on the floor*). See 4c.

*lie, lay* The past tense of *lie* is *lay*: *Today I lie in bed; yesterday I lay [not laid] in bed all day*. See 11d.
Like, as, as if. Usage blurs them, but the writer should distinguish them before he decides to go colloquial. Otherwise, he may throw his readers off.

He looks like me.
He dresses as I do.
He acts as if he were high.

Note that like takes the objective case, and that as, being a conjunction, is followed by the nominative:

She looks like her.
He is as tall as I [am].
He is tall, like me.

The pattern of the prepositional phrase (like me, like a house, like a river) has caused like to replace as where no verb follows in phrases other than comparisons (as . . . as):

It works like a charm. (. . . as a charm works.)
It went over like a lead balloon. (. . . as a lead balloon does.)
They worked like beavers. (. . . as beavers do.)

Notice that as would give these three statements a meaning of substitution or disguise: “It works as a charm” (but it really isn’t a charm); “It went over as a lead balloon” (disguised as a lead balloon).

like, as. To introduce a prepositional phrase of comparison, use like:

He looks like his father.
Some people like the Joneses try to keep up with their neighbors.

To introduce a clause of comparison (with a subject and verb), use as, as if, or as though:

It looks as if his father is not coming.
She wanted to be a lawyer as her mother had been.

The use of like as a conjunction has become more widespread recently, but it is ordinarily better to use the preferred forms as, as if, and as though.

Like instead of like as a conjunction, prefer as, as if, or as though.

CONJUNCTION
She acted as if she had never been on the stage before.

PREPOSITION
She acted like a novice.

CONJUNCTION
She acted like she had never had a date before. (informal)

Such popular expressions as “tell it like it is” derive part of their appeal from their lighthearted defiance of convention.
Do not use like for that as in feel like.
Do not use like (the verb) for lack.

like, as. Avoid the use of like as a subordinating conjunction (At a party, he behaves like he does in church). Use like exclusively as a preposition (At a party, he behaves like a prude). As is the appropriate subordinating conjunction with clauses (At a party, he behaves as he does in church).

like, as, as if. Like is a preposition; as and as if are conjunctions. Though like is often used as a conjunction in speech, writing preserves the distinction (He looks as if [not like] he were tired). Note that as if is followed by the subjunctive were.
Like, when used as a preposition, ruffles no one's usage feathers:

She swims like a fish. (preposition; universally accepted)

But when used as a conjunction replacing as, as if, or as though, like becomes controversial.

**General:** He has never acted like he should.

**Casual:** He has never acted as he should.

**General:** The act as if/as though they were the only drivers on the road.

**Casual:** They act like they were the only drivers on the road.

Because many people find the conjunctive like offensive, it is better to restrict it to personal writing and avoid it when writing to a wide audience. One word of caution, however: don't become so hyper-careful that you err in the other direction, substituting as for like as in:

**As** my mother, **my** roommate always tells me when to get up. (replacing the preposition like with as creates ambiguity)

**like, as, as if, as though** Like is a preposition and introduces a prepositional phrase. As, as if, and as though usually function as subordinating conjunctions and introduce dependent clauses. In college and business writing do not use like as a subordinating conjunction. The sky looks as if (not like) the end of the world is near.

**like, as.** Like used as a preposition: "Like the Bears, the Cardinals are slowly improving." Observe that like takes the object form of the pronoun: "like me," "like them," "like her."

When as is used as a conjunction, the preposition like should not be substituted for it:

**Not this:** The tree is blooming, like it should in the spring.

**But this:** The tree is blooming, as it should in the spring.

This sentence shows a typical distinction made between like and as:

He speaks as his father does, but he looks like his mother. (That is, he looks like her.)

**like** Widely used as a conjunction (in place of as, as if, or as though) in conversation and in public speaking. Formal English, however, still rejects the use of like as a conjunction.

**FORMAL** He drives as [NOT like] I did before my accident.

**or** He drives the way I did before my accident.

**FORMAL** They acted as though [NOT like] they owned the town.

**like, as** Formal usage avoids using like in place of as. Like is a preposition or verb: Your son looks like you. They like ice cream. As is a conjunction: They persuaded her to sing again as [not like] she had in the old days.
literally. Literally means "verbatim, word for word; prosaic." It can also mean "nonfigurative." If you say, "The facts he read in the newspaper literally floored him," you mean that he fell down after he read them.

The word is not an intensifier and does not mean "very" or "very much." If you write "Sam's blood literally turned to ice water," in the next paragraph you had better mention that Sam died shortly after.

literally. Very informal for nearly. In formal writing, literal means "actual, in the dictionary sense of the word." Thus literally bankrupt means "truly bankrupt, absolutely bankrupt." The word should not be used figuratively, as in She literally exploded with anger. We literally died with fright.

Literally

Literally shows that an expression often used in a figurative way is to be taken as true in the sentence where literally appears.

Literally thousands of people gathered for the funeral.

[The writer knows that thousands is sometimes used to mean merely "a great crowd." He wants people to know that if they counted the crowd at the funeral, they would number thousands.]

Literally is often incorrectly used as an intensive adverb. Avoid this usage, which can make you sound misleading or even ridiculous.

He literally scared Grandpa to death.

[He did something so frightening that Grandpa fell over and died.]

His blood literally boiled.

[The use of literally means that his blood rose to 212 degrees Fahrenheit and bubbled.]

Her eyes literally flashed fire.

[This is an extremely dubious statement.]

literally. Originally, literally was used as an adverb meaning the opposite of figuratively. In recent years, some people have been using the word as an intensifier (She literally blew her top). Careful writers still use the word in its original sense of "actually" (The mother literally washed out her son's mouth with soap).

literally. Means precisely as stated, without a figurative sense. If you write x I literally died laughing, you must be writing from beyond the grave. Many writers wrongly use literally to mean definitely or almost or even its opposite, figuratively.

literally, figuratively Literally means "following the letter" or "in a strict sense."

Figuratively is its opposite and means "metaphorically" or "not literally." Don't use literally when you don't mean it.

Literally, the Declaration of Independence is a list of grievances that the English colonists had against their king.

Figuratively, the Declaration of Independence is a document that elevates the rights of the common man above the divine rights of kings.

Literally. Often misused, and overused, as a general emphasis:

"We literally wiped them off the field." Since the word means "by the letter," a literal meaning is distinct from a figurative meaning. His heart was stone means, literally, that his blood pump was, somehow, made of stone; it means, figuratively, "He was cruel." Avoid it unless you mean to show exactly what a word, or a statement, means: To decapitate means literally to take the head off.
Loose, lose Frequently confused. Loose is an adjective; lose is a verb. She wore a loose and trailing gown. Speculators often lose their money.

Do not confuse. Lose is a verb: to lose, did lose, will lose. Lose is chiefly an adjective: "a loose sentence," "to become loose," "at loose ends."

Loose, lose Lose means "to free." Lose means "to be deprived of." (He will lose the dog if he loses him from his leash.)

Loose, lose Loose is an adjective meaning "not rigidly fastened or securely attached." Lose is a verb meaning "to misplace."
The barons turned King John loose after he agreed to sign the Magna Carta.
The marble facing of the building became loose and fell to the sidewalk.
After only two drinks, most people lose their ability to judge distance.

Loose, lose Although often confused, these are two separate items: lose is a verb meaning to misplace; loose is an adjective or adverb meaning free or unfastened.
I lose at least three umbrellas every year.
They were happy to set the deer loose.

Loose, lose. You will lose the game if your defense is loose.

Loose, lose. These words look alike but do not sound alike. Here is a device to help you remember the difference in meaning. The two o's in loose are like two marbles dumped.

Loose, lose Loose means "free, unrestrained," lose means "misplace" (an object) or "have taken from you" (property, rights, life): Our ship broke loose in the storm; we can't afford to lose it.

Loose, lose. The spelling of these words is sometimes confused. Loose is an adjective meaning "not tight" (loose sleeves), or a verb meaning "release" (loosen the rope). Lose is a verb meaning "misplace" (don't lose it).
Lots, lots of, a lot of. Conversational for many, much, great, considerable. Try something else. See Alot.

**IMPROVED**

Henry VIII had many problems.
Latimer showed considerable courage.
Their diet included much pepper.

Lots, lots of Both expressions are colloquial for “a great deal” or “many.” They have no place in college writing.

Colloquial Lots of investors have taken advantage of the high interest rates that money market funds offer.

Revised Many investors have taken advantage of the high interest rates that money market funds offer.

lot, lots Some people find a lot and lots colloq. in the sense of a great many or a good deal: x I could give you lots of reasons. Many would be a safer choice. A lot and lots make colloq. advs. as well: x She pleases me lots. Try very much instead.

See also al lot.

lots, lots of Colloquial for much, many, or a great deal: x I had a great deal of [not lots of] money and bought many [not lots of or a lot of] cars.

lots, lots of Colloquial for a great deal, much, or plenty.

lots, lots of Colloquial substitutes for very many, a great many, or much.

Lot of, lots of Informal in the sense of much, many, a great deal.
**may be,** **maybe**  
May be is a verb phrase, and maybe is an adverb meaning "perhaps."

**may be, maybe**  
Do not confuse the verb phrase may be, with the adverb maybe.

The story may be [or might be] true.  
Maybe [or Perhaps] the story is true.

**may be, maybe.** May be is a verb phrase suggesting possibility; maybe is an adverb meaning "perhaps":

He may be the next mayor.  
Maybe it will rain this afternoon.

**may be, may be**  
May be is a verb, and maybe is an adverb meaning "perhaps": Tuesday may be a legal holiday. Maybe we won’t have classes.

**Maybe/May be**  
Maybe is an adverb; may be is a verb.  
Maybe he can get a summer job selling dictionaries.  
That may be a problem because he doesn’t know how to use one.

**Maybe.** Conversational for perhaps. Sometimes misused for may be. Unless you want an unmistakable colloquial touch, avoid it altogether.

**FAULTY**
The book maybe popular, but maybe it will endure.  
It has sold maybe a million copies.

**IMPROVED**
The book may be popular, but perhaps it will endure.  
It has sold perhaps a million copies.

**maybe, may be**  
Maybe is an adverb meaning "perhaps." May be is a verb phrase.  

Maybe the instructor will mark on a curve if the class does not do well on the test.

Citizen Kane may be the best American movie ever made.

**may be, may be**  
Maybe means "perhaps": may be is a verb form. Be careful to distinguish between the two.
**media** A plural form (singular *medium*) requiring a plural verb (*The mass media are [not is] sometimes guilty of distorting the news*).

**medium, media.** Media is the plural form of *medium*. Be sure to use plural modifiers and plural verbs with *media*. These kinds of mass media—television, radio, newspapers—influence our emotional attitudes.

**medium, media.** Vogue words. Note that *media* is the plural of *medium*. Do not use these nouns as adjectives: “*media* study,” “*media* analysis.” It will clear the mind if you try to substitute the real things for *media*: newspapers, magazines, television, and radio. Given the logic of classification, you will seldom refer to all of these at once—to claim that “the media” are responsible for something or other is probably a false generalization.

**media.** Always plu. Don’t write x The me-
dia is to blame. The sing. is medium.

**media, medium.** Remember that *media* is the plural form:

- Television is a popular medium of entertainment.
- Newspapers and radio are also potent media.

**media.** *Media* is the plural of *medium*: Of all the news *media*, television is the only medium with more visual than verbal content.

**Medium, media.** The singular and the plural. Avoid *medias*, and you will distinguish yourself from the masses.

**media, medium.** *Medium*, meaning a “means of conveying or broadcasting something,” is singular. *Media* is the plural form.

Incorrect: The media is the message.
Correct: The medium is the message.

Television has replaced print and film as the medium of communication that has the most profound effect on our lives. A good business presentation uses a number of media to make its point.
moral, morale As a noun, moral means "ethical conclusion" or "lesson". The moral of the story escapes me. Morale means "spirit" or "state of mind". Victory improved the team's morale.

moral, morale Moral means "virtuous" or "being able to distinguish right from wrong." Morale refers to positive mental and emotional attitudes.

The eighteenth-century theologian Jonathan Edwards believed that people could not be moral without the aid of God. Japanese workers boost their morale by exercising each morning at the factory.

moral, morale Do not confuse. Morale (a noun) refers to mood or spirit. Moral (chiefly an adjective) refers to right conduct or ethical character.

the morale of our team, affecting morale, low morale a moral person, moral judgments, an immoral act

Moral/Morale
The noun moral means "lesson," especially a lesson about morals or one that is supposed to grant a general wisdom about life. It is most commonly used in the idiom the moral of the story.
The noun morale means "attitude" or "mental condition."

Morale dropped sharply among the students in the class when they discovered that they would be penalized for misspelling words.
myself, herself, himself, itself, yourself These and other -self pronouns are reflexive or intensive—that is, they refer to or intensify a noun or another pronoun in a sentence. The family members disagree among themselves, but I myself know how the inheritance should be divided. Colloquially these pronouns often are used in place of personal pronouns in prepositional phrases. This use is inappropriate in college and business writing. None of the team except you (not yourself) has learned to rappel.

myself, yourself, himself Myself is often used in speech as a substitute for I or me but is not standard in written English. Reserve myself for emphatic (I myself will do the work) or reflexive use (I hurt myself). The same applies to the forms yourself, himself, herself, etc.

myself, herself, himself, yourself The -self pronouns are reflexive or intensive, which means they refer to or intensify an antecedent (see 5a-3): Paul and I did it ourselves; Jill herself said so. Though the -self pronouns often are used colloquially in place of personal pronouns, especially as objects of prepositions, they should be avoided in formal speech and writing unless the noun or pronoun they refer to is also present: No one except me (not myself) saw the accident. Our delegates will be Susan and you (not yourself).

Myself. Use it only reflexively (“I hurt myself”), or intensively (“I myself often have trouble”). Fear of me leads to the incorrect “They gave it to John and myself.” Do not use myself, himself, herself, themselves for me, him, her, them.

Myself (Himself, Herself, etc.) All the pronouns ending with -self are best used as reflexives that intensify the stress on the noun or pronoun that serves as the antecedent.

“I cleaned the stables myself,” Hercules said.
[He wanted to stress that he did the job without delegating it and without having help from anyone.]
Standing in the doorway was Count Dracula himself with a silver goblet in his hand.
We ourselves have often been guilty of the same fault.
Although in casual speech some people use the -self pronouns instead of ordinary pronouns, you should always avoid nonstandard usages like the following:

NONSTANDARD: The quarrel was between him and myself.
STANDARD: The quarrel was between him and me.

NONSTANDARD: John and myself shoed the horses.
STANDARD: John and I shoed the horses.

Sometimes when you are unsure of whether to use I, me, she, her, he, or him after a verb, you may be tempted to substitute one of the reflexive pronouns, which sounds safer: “The guest list included Roxie Jones and myself.” But such usage is wrong, and you should avoid it.

myself Standard as an intensive or a reflexive pronoun: “I myself saw a UFO” (intensive). “Momentarily I hated myself” (reflexive). Not acceptable formally and still questionable informally as a replacement for the subjective form I or the objective me.

My sister and I [not myself] prefer soccer.
He confided in Hayden as well as me [not myself].
myself  Don't use the intensive pro. myself as a free substitute for I or me: x The other Fingerlickers and myself will stop at nothing in our terrorism against Colonel Sanders. Keep myself for emphatic or reflexive uses: I myself intend to do it: I admire myself.

Myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself These words are reflexives or intensives, not strict equivalents of I, me, you, he, she, him, her, it.

**INTENSIVE**
I myself helped Father cut the wheat.
I helped Father cut the wheat myself.

**REFLEXIVE**
I cut myself.

**NOT**
The elopement was known only to Sherry and myself.

**BUT**
The elopement was known only to Sherry and me.

**NOT**
Only Kay and myself had access to the safe.

**BUT**
Only Kay and I had access to the safe.

**myself.** A reflexive or intensive pronoun, used to refer back to I in the same sentence:

I hurt myself. I, myself, am the only one to blame.

It is not more formal or proper to substitute myself for I. 

Handwritten notes are not transcribed.
Nice. A weak substitute for more exact words like attractive, modest, pleasant, kind, and so forth.

nice, nice and Nice is overused as a vague word of approval meaning attractive, agreeable, friendly, pleasant,” and the like. Use a more exact word. Nice and as an intensifier (The beer was nice and cold) is colloquial.

nice. An overworked, vague casualism. Use a more vivid and specific word.

nice Avoid using nice as a vague word of approval. Nice and is informal: The engine started easily [not nice and easy].
Nohow/Nowheres

These are nonstandard for any way, in no way, in any way, in any place, and in no place. Don’t use these words in writing.

nowhere, nowheres

Nowheres is colloquial. Use “nowhere” in formal speech and writing.

When Dorothy arrived in Oz, she realized that she was nowhere (not nowheres) she had ever been before.

nowheres

Nonstandard for nowhere.

nowheres

A mistake for nowhere.

nowheres

Nonstandard for nowhere.

nowhere near.

Slang for not nearly, far from.

nowhere/nowheres

Nowheres is a colloquial variant of nowhere and is generally avoided in written English.

General: Mary could find him nowhere.
Casual: Mary could find him nowheres.

Caution: Combining not with nowhere creates a double negative, appropriate only to dialogue: Mary couldn’t find him nowhere.

nohow, nowheres

Nohow is nonstandard for not at all; nowheres is nonstandard for nowhere.

Nowheres

Dialectal. Use nowhere.

nowheres

Nonstandard for nowhere.

nowheres

Nonstandard for nowhere.

nowheres

Nonstandard or regional for nowhere.

Nowhere, no place.

Use nowhere (not nowheres), and reserve no place (not no place) only for literal meanings: “He could find no place that would hold it.”

Nowhere near.

Use not nearly, or far from, unless you really mean near: “He was nowhere near the end.” See Near.

AWKWARD

It was nowhere near long enough.
They had nowhere near enough food.

IMPROVED

It was not nearly long enough.
They had far from enough food.
**off of** In formal writing, omit the *of* after off in such phrases as “fell off of the ladder.”

- Off of *Off is sufficient.
  He fell off (not off of) the water tower.*

**off of, off from** Wordy and colloquial (*The paper slid off [not off of] the table.*)

- off of *Should be off or from: She jumped off [from] the bridge, not She jumped off of the bridge.*

**off of, off from** Redundant: *Take everything off [not off of] the floor before you leave.*

- off of *A colloquial expression that means no more than off: He jumped off the cliff.*

- off of *Off is unnecessary. Use off or from rather than off of: He jumped off (or from, not off of) the roof.*

**off of** Omit the *of.*

- NOT: He knocked the hide off of the ball.
- BUT: He knocked the hide off the ball.

**off of.** In “He got off of the couch,” the preposition *of* is unnecessary: “He got off the couch.” Sometimes the construction should be changed:

- Not this: He fell off of the top of the car.
- But this: He fell from the top of the car.

**off of.** Write from: “He jumped from his horse.”
O.K., OK, okay. A colloquial form. All three forms are acceptable.

OK, O.K., okay All are standard forms, but formal writing prefers a more exact word.

OK, O.K., okay All are acceptable spellings, but avoid using them in college and business writing.

O.K., OK, okay Informal.

OK, O.K., okay Informal for acceptable or yes. All three spellings are used.

OK, O.K., okay All three are accepted as standard forms expressing general approval. However, a more specific word usually replaces OK in a formal context.

OK, O.K., okay All three spellings are acceptable, but avoid this colloquial term in formal speech and writing.

OK. OK (or okay) has been in the language for about 140 years, but it remains too slangy for all uses except the most casual.

OK, O.K., okay All three forms are considered correct spellings. This expression, however, is colloquial and should not be used in formal speech or academic writing. In business and technical situations, OK is acceptable shorthand for approval or endorsement.

Our plant supervisor OK’d the changes you suggested.

Or

Our plant supervisor approved the changes you suggested.
people, persons  Colloquially these terms are interchangeable. In formal speech and writing, however, *people* refers to an undifferentiated group. *Persons* indicates a body of individuals.

Orson Welles's 1938 radio production of *War of the Worlds* was so realistic that it terrified many of the *people* who heard it. The persons who witnessed the crash of the German airship *Hindenburg* gave their versions of the tragedy.

*People* refers to a collective mass and emphasizes faceless anonymity. *Persons* refers to individuals who make up the group and emphasizes separate identity. *People surged into the convention hall. Several persons angrily denounced the membership's reluctance to act.*

*People, persons* In formal speech and writing, *people* refers to a general group: *We the people of the United States.* . . . *Persons* refers to a collection of individuals: *Will the person or persons who saw the accident please notify.* . . . Except when emphasis on individuals is desired, *people* is preferable to *persons.*