LAB 6: Word Usage

The following words and phrases are often used incorrectly in everyday speech and in business writing. Learn to use them correctly to help achieve your communication goals.

In some cases in the following list, one word is often confused with another similar word; in other cases, the structure of our language requires that certain words be used only in certain ways. Because of space, only brief and incomplete definitions are given here. Consult a dictionary for more complete or additional meanings.

6.1 Accept/Except   Accept means “to agree to”; except means “with the exclusion of.”

I will accept all the recommendations except the last one.

6.2 Advice/Advise   Advice is a noun meaning “counsel”; advise is a verb meaning “to recommend.”

If I ask for her advice, she may advise me to quit.

6.3 Affect/Effect   Affect is most often used as a verb meaning “to influence” or “to change”; effect is most often used as a noun meaning “result” or “impression.”

The legislation may affect sales but should have no effect on gross margin.

6.4 All Right/Alright Use all right. (Alright is considered substandard.)

The arrangement is all right (not alright) with me.

6.5 A Lot/Alot     Use a lot. (Alot is considered substandard.)

We used a lot (not alot) of overtime on the project.

6.6 Among/Between  Use among when referring to three or more; use between when referring to two.

Among the three candidates was one manager who divided his time between London and New York.
6.7 Amount/Number Use amount to refer to money or to things that cannot be counted; use number to refer to things that can be counted.

The amount of consumer interest was measured by the number of coupons returned.

6.8 Anxious/Eager Use anxious only if great concern or worry is involved.

Jon was eager to get the new car although he was anxious about making such high payments.

6.9 Any One/Anyone Spell as two words when followed by of; spell as one word when the accent is on any.

Anyone is allowed to attend any one of the sessions.

Between See Among/Between.

6.10 Can/May Can indicates ability; may indicates permission.

I can finish the project on time if I may hire an additional secretary.

6.11 Cite/Sight/Site Cite means “to quote” or “to mention”; sight is either a verb meaning “to look at” or a noun meaning “something seen”; site is most often a noun meaning “location.”

The sight of the high-rise building on the site of the old battlefield reminded Monica to cite several other examples to the commission members.

6.12 Complement/Compliment Complement means “to complete” or “something that completes”; compliment means “to praise” or “words of praise.”

I must compliment you on the new model, which will complement our line.

6.13 Could of/Could’ve Use could’ve (or could have). (Could of is incorrect.)

We could’ve (not could of) prevented that loss had we been more alert.

6.14 Different from/Different than Use different from. (Different than is considered substandard.)

Your computer is different from (not different than) mine.

6.15 Each Other/One Another Use each other when referring to two; use one another when referring to three or more.

The two workers helped each other, but their three visitors would not even look at one another.

Eager See Anxious/Eager.

Effect See Affect/Effect.
6.16 e.g./i.e. The abbreviation e.g. means "for example"; i.e. means "that is." Use i.e. to introduce a restatement or explanation of a preceding expression. Both abbreviations, like the expressions for which they stand, are followed by commas. (Many writers prefer the full English terms to the abbreviations because they are clearer.)

The proposal has merit; e.g., it is economical, forward-looking, and timely.

Or: The proposal has merit; for example, it is economical, forward-looking, and timely.

Unfortunately, it is also a hot potato; i.e., it will generate unfavorable publicity.

Or: Unfortunately, it is also a hot potato; that is, it will generate unfavorable publicity.

6.17 Eminent/Imminent Eminent means "well-known"; imminent means "about to happen."

The arrival of the eminent scientist from Russia is imminent.

6.18 Enthusied/Enthusiastic Use enthusiastic. (Enthused is considered substandard.)

I have become quite enthusiastic (not enthused) about the possibilities.

Except See Accept/Except.

6.19 Farther/Further Farther refers to distance; further refers to extent or degree.

We drove 10 miles farther while we discussed the matter further.

6.20 Fewer/Less Use fewer to refer to things that can be counted; use less to refer to money or to things that cannot be counted.

Alvin worked fewer hours at the exhibit and therefore generated less interest.

Further See Farther/Further.

6.21 Good/Well Good is an adjective; well is an adverb or (with reference to health) an adjective.

Joe does a good job and performs well on tests, even when he does not feel well.

i.e. See e.g./i.e.

Imminent See Eminent/Imminent.

6.22 Imply/Infer Imply means "to hint" or "to suggest"; infer means "to draw a conclusion." Speakers and writers imply; readers and listeners infer.
The president implied that changes will be forthcoming; I inferred from his tone of voice that these changes will not be pleasant.

6.23 Irregardless/Regardless  Use regardless. (Irregardless is considered substandard.)

He wants to proceed, regardless (not irregardless) of the costs.

6.24 Its/It’s  Its is a possessive pronoun; it’s is a contraction for “it is.”

It’s time to let the department increase its budget.

6.25 Lay/Lie  Lay (principal forms: lay, laid, lain, laying) means “to put” and requires an object to complete its meaning; lie (principal forms: lie, lay, lain, lying) means “to rest.”

Please lay the supplies on the shelf.  I lie on the couch after lunch each day.
I laid the folders in the drawer.  The report lay on his desk yesterday.
She had laid the notes on her desk.  The job has lain untouched for a week.

Less  See Fewer/Less.

Lie  See Lay/Lie.

6.26 Loose/Lose  Loose means “not fastened”; lose means “to be unable to find.”

Do not lose the loose change in your pocket.

May  See Can/May.

Number  See Amount/Number.

One Another  See Each Other/One Another.

6.27 Passed/Past  Passed is a verb (the past tense or past participle of pass, meaning “to move on or by”); past is an adjective, adverb, or preposition meaning “earlier.”

The committee passed the no-confidence motion at a past meeting.

6.28 Percent/Percentage  With figures, use percent; without figures, use percentage.

We took a commission of 6 percent (or 6%), which was a lower percentage than last year.

6.29 Personal/Personnel  Personal means “private” or “belonging to one individual”; personnel means “employees.”

I used my personal time to draft a memo to all personnel.
6.30 **Principal/Principle**  *Principal* means "primary" (adjective) or "sum of money" (noun); *principle* means "rule" or "law."

The guiding **principle** is fair play, and the **principal** means of achieving it is a code of ethics.

6.31 **Real/Really**  *Real* is an adjective; *really* is an adverb. Do not use *real* to modify another adjective.

She was **really** (not *real*) proud that her necklace contained **real** pearls.

6.32 **Reason Is Because/Reason Is That**  Use *reason is that*. *(Reason is because is considered substandard.)*

The **reason** for such low attendance is **that** (not *is because*) the weather was stormy.

**Regardless**  See *Irregardless/Regardless."

6.33 **Same**  Do not use *same* to refer to a previously mentioned item. Use *it* or some other wording instead.

We have received your order and will ship it (not *same*) in three days.

6.34 **Set/Sit**  *Set* (principal forms: *set, set, setting*) means "to place"; *sit* (principal forms: *sit, sat, sitting*) means "to be seated."

Please **set** your papers on the table.  Please sit in the chair.
She **set** the computer on the desk.  She **sat** in the first-class section.
I have **set** the computer there before.  I **had not sat** there before.

6.35 **Should of/Should’ve**  Use *should’ve* (or *should have*). *(Should of is incorrect.)*

We **should’ve** (not *should of*) been more careful.

**Sight**  See *Cite/Sight/Site."

**Sit**  See *Set/Sit."

**Site**  See *Cite/Sight/Site."

6.36 **Stationary/Stationery**  *Stationary* means "remaining in one place"; *stationery* is writing paper.

I used my personal **stationery** to write them to ask whether the minicomputer should remain **stationary.**
6.37 Sure/Surely    *Sure* is an adjective; *surely* is an adverb. Do not use *sure* to modify another adjective.

I'm *surely* (not *sure*) glad that she is running and feel *sure* that she will be nominated.

6.38 Sure and/Sure to    Use *sure to.* (*Sure and* is considered substandard.)

Be *sure to* (not *sure and*) attend the meeting.

6.39 Their/There/They’re    *Their* means “belonging to them”; *there* means “in that place”; and *they’re* is a contraction for “they are.”

*They’re* too busy with their reports to be *there* for the hearing.

6.40 Theirs/There’s    *Their* is a possessive pronoun; *there’s* is a contraction for “there is.”

We finished our meal but *there’s* no time for them to finish *theirs.*

*They’re*    See Their/There/They’re.

6.41 Try and/Try to    Use *try to.* (*Try and* is considered substandard.)

Please try to (not *try and*) attend the meeting.

*Well*    See Good/Well.

6.42 Whose/Who’s    *Whose* is a possessive pronoun; *who’s* is a contraction for “who is.”

*Who’s* going to let us know *whose* turn it is to make *coffee*?

6.43 Your/You’re    *Your* means “belonging to you”; *you’re* is a contraction for “you are.”

*You’re* going to present *your* report first.

**APPLICATION**

**DIRECTIONS**    Select the correct words in parentheses.

1. Please (advice/advise) the (eminent/imminent) educator of the (real/really) interest we have in his lecture.

2. The three workers on the (stationary/stationery) platform (can/may) help (each other/one another) if they are running late.

3. The writer (implied/inferred) that she and her colleagues divided (their/their/they’re) time about evenly (among/between) the two projects.

4. (Whose/Who’s) convinced that (fewer/less) of our employees (can/may) pass the exam!
5. If you (loose/lose) seniority, (your/you’re) work schedule might be (affected/effectuated).

6. Mary Ellen (cited/sighted/sited) several examples showing that our lab employees are (real/really) (good/well) protected from danger.

7. In comparing performance (among/between) the two companies, Brenda noted that our company earned 7 (percent/percentage) more than (theirs/there’s).

8. Try (and/to) (complement/compliment) the advertising group for (its/it’s) stunning new brochure.

9. When Susan (laid/lay) the models on the table, I was surprised at the (amount/number) of moving parts; (e.g./i.e.), I had expected simpler designs.

10. The reason the (personal/personnel) department (could of/could’ve) been mistaken is (that/because) we failed to keep them informed.

11. Sherry refused to (accept/except) the continuous-form (stationary/stationery) because it had (fewer/less) absorbency than expected.

12. (Your/You’re) being paid by the (amount/number) of defective finished products you (cite/sight/site) while observing on the assembly line.

13. The (principal/principle) reason we’re (anxious/eager) to solve this problem is that (a lot/alot) of workers have complained of dizziness.

14. All our customers are (enthused/enthusiastic) about the new pricing (accept/except) for Highland’s, which asked for a quantity discount and expected (it/same) to be granted.

15. Be sure (and/to) point out to her that the (percent/percentage) of commission we pay new agents is no different (from/than) that which we pay experienced agents.

16. I am (anxious/eager) to see if (its/it’s) going to be Arlene (whose/who’s) design will be selected.

17. I (implied/inferred) from Martin’s remarks that Austin is a (sure/surely) bet as the (cite/sight/site) for our new plant.

18. The (principal/principle) (advice/advise) that Michelle gave was to (set/sit) long-term goals and stick to them.

19. Although (their/there/they’re) located (farther/further) from our office than I would like, I believe their expertise will (complement/compliment) our own.

20. (Any one/Anyone) who can (farther/further) refine the (loose/lose) ends of our proposal should come back this afternoon.

21. In the previous shot, Joyce and Kathy (should of/should’ve) been (laying/lying) next to (each other/one another) on the beach, discussing their plans for the evening.

22. Please (set/sit) awhile and tell them about your (passed, past) adventures in the Foreign Service, (e.g./i.e.), the time you were arrested in Buenos Aires for doing a (good/well) deed for a local shopkeeper.
23. (Theirs/There's) no reason to pry into an applicant's (personal/personnel) life; however, it is (all right/alright) to ask about the applicant's general state of health.

24. (Any one/Anyone) of the stockbrokers, (irregardless/regardless) of his or her philosophy, would (sure/surely) question such a strategy.

25. (Their/There/They're) will be little (affect/effect) on operations from the (eminent/imminent) change in ownership of the firm.