

Verbal Abuse

words commonly misused, misspelled, or confused

- myriad Many well-educated individuals believe that the word myriad should only be used as an adjective (“There are myriad reasons to...”) rather than as a noun (“There are a myriad of reasons to...”). However, it is acceptable to use myriad either way. (*Myriad* originally stood for “ten thousand” and now means something akin to “multitude”). Large numbers like thousand, million, and myriad function as collective nouns when they are not being used as modifiers (adjectives). Having said that, a lot of us still use it only as an adjective simply because so many people believe it’s incorrect when they see it as a noun.
- dilemma Writers often use this word for any problem. A true dilemma means there are two choices (di), both of which are undesirable.
- ironic Thanks in some part to Alanis Morrisette (“Isn’t it Ironic?”), people use the word “irony” or “ironic” when referring to anything unfortunate. Rain on your wedding day, for example, isn’t ironic. It’s just bad luck. For a situation to be ironic, the result must be the opposite of what was intended or expected. It is ironic when we say one thing, but clearly mean another.
- literally This word is often confused with “figuratively,” which is its opposite. *Literally* means *actually*. If I say that I literally ate a mountain of mashed potatoes, I’m saying that I actually did.
- tragic People tend to apply the term “tragic” to any sad event. If your 98-year-old grandmother passes away in her sleep, it is sad – but it’s not tragic. It is normal and natural. For something to be tragic, there must have been the possibility of preventing it from happening if a mistake hadn’t been made. A young man dying in a drunk driving accident is tragic; his life was cut short due to poor judgment.
- unique Unique means “one of a kind” or “unequaled.” This word is like *dead* or *pregnant*. There are no degrees of uniqueness. One thing can’t be more unique than another. Something either IS unique, or isn’t. It can’t be slightly unique, somewhat unique, very unique or rather unique.
- graduated If you are talking about a school, you graduate *from* it. You don’t graduate it.
- NO – Bob graduated high school and college.
 NO – Did he graduate college yet?
 YES – Bob graduated from high school and college.

plethora	plethora means an abundance or an excess; it is a noun NO – There were plethora students in the cafeteria. YES – There was a plethora of students in the cafeteria.
accept/except	accept = to take or agree to something except = to exclude or leave out
affect/effect	effect = NOUN “The termites had an <i>effect</i> on the piano.” affect = VERB “The termite problem <i>affects</i> her playing.” <u>Exceptions:</u> affect is a noun when used as a psychological term for “emotion” – “ <i>The depressed woman displayed a lack of affect.</i> ” effect is also a verb meaning “achieve” or “bring about” – “ <i>An exterminator effected the removal of the termites.</i> ”
all ready/already	all ready = prepared already = previously
all together / altogether	all together = at the same time, collectively altogether = in sum or entirety
allude/refer	allude = mention indirectly or hint at refer = to mention directly
allusion/illusion	allusion = an indirect mention of something illusion = a false impression
anxious/eager	anxious = nervously anticipating something eager = gladly anticipating something “Trudy is <i>eager</i> to have a pony, but her mother is <i>anxious</i> about the cost.”
any more/ anymore	any more = any additional anymore = nowadays or any longer

any one/
anyone

Only use *anyone* if you could substitute *anybody*

“Has anyone seen Bob?”
“He could be any one of these guys.”

any way/
anyway

It’s only one word if you mean “in any way”

“Is there *any way* to get tickets?”
“I’d rather see the other show, *anyway*.”

a while/
awhile

awhile = for a time
a while = a period of time

“She rested awhile.”
“She rested for a while.”

bad/badly

bad = adjective
badly = adverb

Oliver ran the race badly; afterwards, he felt bad.

can/may

can = ability
may = permitted

complement/
compliment

complement = to complete or round out something
compliment = to praise or admire

e.g. / i.e.

e.g. = *exempli gratia* = for example
i.e. = *id est* = that is

every day/
everyday

Only use everyday if you’re using it as an adjective.

“These are my *everyday* shoes.”
“I wear them *every day*.”

every one/
everyone

Only use “everyone” if you could substitute “everybody”

imminent/ eminent	imminent = impending or about to happen eminent = famous or superior
farther/further	farther = physical distance further = to a greater extent or degree
fewer/less	fewer = a small number of individual things less = a small quantity of something
allude/elude	allude = to make allusion to elude = to escape or evade
insure/ensure	insure = to obtain insurance for; to protect against risk ensure = to make sure or certain of
good/well	good = adjective well = adverb “She cooked <i>well</i> ; therefore, her food tasted <i>good</i> .”
moral/morale	moral = of sound ethical or religious practice morale = state of spirit or mind “Women’s reproductive rights are often thought of as a moral issue.” “Morale at the school has been low since the accident.”
amoral/ immoral	amoral = lacking moral sensibilities immoral = contrary to established moral principles
imply/infer	imply = to express indirectly or to hint at infer = to figure out from clues or evidence
principle/ principal	principle = a basic truth, law, or assumption principal = first or highest in rank

lose/loose	lose = to misplace or to not win loose = not fastened, restrained, or contained
since/sense	since has to do with time sense has to do with feeling or thought
its/it's	its = possessive it's = it is
who's/whose	whose = possessive who's = who is
your/you're	your = possessive you're = you are
to/two/too	to = in direction toward two = 2 too = also or excessively
in to / into	into = use <i>into</i> entering something or changing form in to = use <i>in to</i> in all other circumstances “She turned me into a newt!” “I am going <i>into</i> physics when I start college.” “We walked <i>into</i> the library.” “Bring my books <i>in to</i> the study.” “Let’s all go <i>in to</i> dinner.”
on to / onto	onto = on top of or aware of something on to = all other circumstances “I’m <i>onto</i> your plan!” “The water poured <i>onto</i> my head.” “Milo drove <i>on to</i> Chicago.” “He moved <i>on to</i> better things.”
oral/verbal	oral = by spoken word verbal = by written OR spoken word
set/sit	set = to place something sit = to be seated

than/then	<p>than = comparison word, as in “more than” or “less than” then = indicates order or cause/effect</p> <p>“I am taller <i>than</i> Henry.” “I went to the store, <i>then</i> to the dry cleaner.” “If you don’t like her, <i>then</i> avoid her.”</p>
whether or not	ditch the “or not”; just use “whether”
passed/past	<p>passed = went by or elapsed (verb) past = beyond or no longer current (adjective or noun)</p>
cite/site	<p>cite = to make reference to site = place (such as a web site)</p>
elicit/illicit	<p>elicit = to draw out illicit = illegal, immoral, or against accepted rules</p>
advice/advise	<p>advice = noun advise = verb</p>
lay / lie	<p>lay = to place something down (transitive verb)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Today I <u>lay</u> the book on the table. Yesterday I <u>laid</u> the book on the table. Tomorrow I <u>will lay</u> the book on the table. I <u>have been laying</u> the book on the table every day for a year. I may <u>have laid</u> the book on the table, but I’m not sure.</p> <p>lie = to recline (intransitive verb)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Today I <u>lie</u> down. Yesterday I <u>lay</u> down. Tomorrow I <u>will lie</u> down. I <u>have been lying</u> down every night my entire life. I may <u>have lain</u> down at 10 PM, but I’m not sure.</p>
on	<p>“on” does not take the place of “about”</p> <p>NO: I was wondering on YES: I was wondering about NO: I was thinking on YES: I was thinking about NO: I was dreaming on YES: I was dreaming about</p>