A

*a*, **an**

Use *a* before a consonant sound, *an* before a vowel sound.

*a* heavy load, *a* nap, *a* sound; *an* island, *an* honest man, *an* umpire.

**accept**, **except**

As a verb, *accept* means "to receive"; *except* means "to exclude." *Except* as a preposition also means "but."

Every senator **except** Mr. Browning refused to accept the bribe. We will **except** (exclude) this novel from the list of those to be read.

**advice**, **advise**

*Advice* is a noun; *advise* is a verb. I **advise** you to follow Estelle's **advice**.

**affect**, **effect**

*Affect* is a verb meaning "to act upon, to influence, or to imitate."

*Effect* may be either a verb or a noun. *Effect* as a verb means "to cause or to bring about"; *effect* as a noun means "a result or a consequence."

The patent medicine did not **affect** (influence) the disease. Henry **affected** the manner of an Oxford student. (imitated) Henry **effected** a change in his schedule. (brought about)

The **effect** (result) of this change was that he had no Friday classes.

**aggravate**

*Aggravate* means "to make more grave, to worsen." A problem or condition is aggravated. A person is not aggravated; a person is annoyed.

CORRECT: The heavy rains **aggravated** the slippery roads.

CORRECT: The drivers were **annoyed** by the slippery roads.

INCORRECT: The drivers were **aggravated** by the slippery roads. CORRECT: Her headache was **aggravated** by the damp weather. INCORRECT: She was **aggravated** by driving in the heavy traffic. CORRECT: She was **annoyed** by driving in the heavy traffic.

**agree to**, **agree with**

Agree to a thing (plan, proposal); agree with a person.

He **agreed to** the insertion of the plank in the platform of the party. He **agreed with** the senator that the plank would not gain many votes.

**all ready**, **already**

*All ready* means "prepared, in a state of readiness"; *already* means "before some specified time" and describes an action that is completed.

The players were **all ready** to begin. (fully prepared) They had **already** started before we arrived.

**all together**, **altogether**

*All together* describes a group as acting or existing collectively; *altogether* means "wholly, entirely."

The players managed to start **all together**.

I do not **altogether** understand the decision.

**allusion**, **illusion**
An allusion is a casual reference. An illusion is a false or misleading sight or impression. The speaker made an allusion to Hamlet.

a lot
Colloquial. Do not use. Use a more specific term.
I bought several pairs of socks at the outlet (not a lot of socks).

allude, elude, refer
One alludes to a book or an event and eludes a pursuer. Do not confuse allude, which is an indirect reference, with refer, which is a specific one.
Marjorie alluded to the prisoner who had recently eluded the police.

alright
Do not use. The accepted spelling is all right.

altar, alter
Altar is a noun and is an elevated place, table, or other structure on or before which religious sacrifices or ceremonies are performed. Alter is a verb meaning to change, modify, or make different.

among, between
Among is used with three or more persons or things; between is used with only two. It will be hard to choose between the two candidates.
It will be hard to choose among the many candidates.

amoral, immoral
Something amoral is outside morality and not be be judged by moral standards. The behavior of animals and the orbits of planets are equally amoral. Anything immoral is a violation of a moral standard. Stealing is considered to be an immoral act.

amount, number
Amount refers to mass or quantity; number refers to things which may be counted.

and/or
Do not use except in legal or business documents.

anxious, eager
Anxious means "apprehensive, doubtful, or uneasy" and is not synonymous with eager, which means "to be impatient or to anticipate with pleasure."
Martha is eager to attend the reception, but she is anxious about traveling across town by herself.

any one, anyone
Anyone is used in the sense of "anybody" and is written as one word. Any one means "any single person" or "any single thing."
Anyone can pass this course.

Any one of your students can learn the material.

as seen, as shown, as stated, as demonstrated, etc.
Do not use.
INCORRECT: His crimes caused him to suffer, as seen in many of his actions.
CORRECT: Many of his actions show that his crimes caused him to suffer. The suffering caused by his crimes is seen in many of his actions.
That his crimes caused him to suffer is seen in many of his actions.

as to whether, as to why
Wordy. Whether or why is sufficient.
B
because
See reason is(was) because below.

C
can, may
Can is used to denote ability; may is used to denote permission. May (not can) I go to the restroom?
He can lift heavy loads easily.
capital, capitol
Capitol designates "a building which is a seat of government"; capital is used for all other meanings.
cannot help but
Do not use.
INCORRECT: I cannot help but wonder about her honesty.
To correct: drop the word but and change the following word to an -ing word (gerund).
CORRECT: I cannot help wondering about her honesty.
center around
Illogical: use center in (or on) or cluster around.
childish, childlike
Childish means "disagreeably like a child." Childlike means "agreeably like a child." The childish whining of the chronic complainer soon becomes unbearably boring. Picasso's canvasses express his childlike love of color.
cite, sight, site
Cite is a verb meaning to mention a support, illustration, or proof. Sight, as a noun or a verb, has to do with seeing. Site, as a noun or a verb, has to do with setting or location.
claim
Claim means "to demand or ask for as one's own or one's due." It is not synonymous with such words as say.
CORRECT: He claimed the reward.
CORRECT: He said (not claimed) that I was guilty.
climactic, climatic
Climactic refers to a climax; climatic refers to climate.
complement, compliment
To complement means "to complete"; to compliment means "to praise." Both words can also be nouns and have the adjective forms complementary and complimentary.
That sentence contains no complement.
June was embarrassed by the unexpected compliment.
conscience, conscious
Do not confuse. Conscience means "a knowledge of right and wrong; moral judgment." Conscious means "awake" or "able to feel and think."
consensus of opinion.
Do not use. The word consensus itself denotes a general opinion.
contemptible, contemptuous
Contemptible means "deserving of scorn"; contemptuous means "feeling scorn." He is a contemptible person.
We are contemptuous of his contemptible treatment of his parents.

continual, continuous
Continual means "repeated regularly and frequently." Continuous means "repeated without interruption."

cope
Do not use to mean "to deal with" or "to handle."
John will have to learn to deal with his emotions (not to cope with).

could of
Nonstandard for could have.
couple, couple of
Informal for two or several. Do not use in formal writing.
credible, creditable, credulous
Credible means "believable"; creditable means "worthy of praise"; a person is credulous if he is ready to believe, especially if is so ready that he seems gullible.
CORRECT: His account of the accident was so credible that no one will dispute it
CORRECT: His generosity to the college is most creditable.
CORRECT: He is credulous enough to believe even the most incredible story
CORRECT: It is incredible [unbelievable] that even a credulous [believing] person would think that Mary's work was creditable [worthy of credit].
crisis situation
Redundant. Crisis is sufficient.

D
data, media, phenomena, criteria
These words are the plural forms of the singular words datum, medium, phenomenon, and criterion.
The datum is misleading.
The data are misleading.
deal
Do not use to mean "a bargain," "a transaction," or "a business arrangement."
different from, different than
Use different from to introduce nouns and pronouns, different than to introduce clauses.
Republicans are different from Democrats.
College is different than I expected it to be.
dilemma
Dilemma does not mean "an acute problem." It means "the necessary choice between evenly balanced alternatives, most often unattractive ones."
disinterested, uninterested
Disinterested means "objective, impartial, and unbiased." Uninterested means "without any interest in" or "lacking in interest."
We need a disinterested person to settle our dispute, but Louise is obviously uninterested in our quarrel.
double negative
Do not use such phrases as cannot help but, cannot hardly, cannot scarcely, etc.
E

each other, one another
Use each other when only two people or things are involved and one another when more than two are involved.
The twins fought each other.
The three brothers looked at one another.

eminent, imminent, immanent
Eminent means "distinguished" (He is an eminent novelist); imminent means "about to happen, threatening" (The storm seemed imminent); immanent means "indwelling, invading all creation" (Is the deity immanent in the universe?).

ensure, insure
Ensure means "make sure" or "guarantee," as "There is no way to ensure that every provision of the treaty will be honored." Insure means "to make a contract for payment in the event of financial loss, damage, injury, or death," as in "I insured the package for fifty dollars." It is possible to use both words in the same sentence: "We tried to ensure that our customers would insure with us." The difference between the two words should be plain from their uses in this sentence.

enthalused
Do not use. Enthusiastic is the correct form.

epic, play, novel, short story
Do not confuse these terms.
The Iliad is an epic and should not be referred to as a play. Hamlet is a play and should not be referred to as a story. See story.

equally as good
A confusion of equally good and just as good. Use either phrase in place of the incorrect phrase equally as good.
Their TV set cost more than ours, but ours is equally good. (Not equally as good)
Our TV set is just as good as theirs. (Not equally as good)

F
farther, further
Use farther in expressions of physical distance and further in expressions of time, quality, and degree.
My car used less gasoline and went farther than his.
The second speaker went further into the issues than the first.

feel, think
Do not use the verb to feel as a substitute for to think or to believe.
Hamlet thinks [not feels] that his mother has remarried too soon after his father's death. Lincoln believed [not felt] that the nation had been founded on the principle of equality. Use the verb to feel for matters that are felt.

fewer, less
Use fewer to denote number; less, to denote amount or degree. Use fewer to modify things that can be counted.
There are **fewer** flowers in the vase than there were yesterday. There is **less** flour in the bowl than when we began. The American Heritage Dictionary says that less is used with plurals that indicate a unit, such as distances (less than 150 miles), periods of time (less than twenty minutes), and sums of money (less than two hundred dollars). Note that most words following **fewer** are plural (fewer apples, calories, books); most words following **less** are singular (less fruit, weight, knowledge).

**first, start, beginning**
Do not use **first** or **start** as substitutes for **beginning** when referring to a literary composition.  
At the **beginning** of the play, a ghost appears to Hamlet's friends. (Not **At the start** or **At the first of the play.**)  

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

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

**G**

**get, got, gotten**
The preferable form of the past and past participle is **got**, not **gotten**. They returned without having **got** (not **gotten**) any.

**H**

**had, have, had of, had ought**
Do not use for **had**.

If he **had** tried, he would have won (Not **If he had have [or had of] tried, he would have won.**)  

**hang, hanged, hung**
When **hang** means "to suspend," **hung** is its past tense. We **hung** the picture last night. When **hang** means "to execute," **hanged** is its past tense. The prisoner was **hanged** at noon.

**have got**
Do not use for **have**.

I **have** to study more. (Not **I have got to study more.**)  

**hopefully**
Use **hopefully** correctly as an adverb to mean "in a hopeful manner." The puppy looked **hopefully** at his master.  
Do not use **hopefully** to mean "I hope."

**INCORRECT:** **Hopefully,** it will not rain this weekend. **CORRECT:** **I hope** that it will not rain this weekend.

**NOTE:** Do not change **hopefully** to "It is to be hoped that" or "I am hopeful that."

**human, human beings**
Do not substitute **human** or **humans** for **human being** or **human beings.** Every **human being** (not **human**) should want to learn. **Human beings** (not **Humans**) are often inconsistent.
I
imply, infer
*Imply* means "to hint" or "to suggest"; *infer* means "to draw a conclusion." The speaker *implied* that Mr. Dixon was guilty.
The audience *inferred* that Mr. Dixon was guilty.
in, into
*Into* denotes motion from the outside to the inside; *in* denotes position (enclosure). The lion was *in* the cage when the trainer walked *into* the tent.
in back of
Do not use for *behind*.
INCORRECT: Albert was standing *in back of* the curtain. CORRECT: Albert was standing *behind* the curtain.
in regards to
Do not use. Use *in regard to* or *with regard to*. *irregardless*
Do not use. The word is a mistaken fusion of *irrespective* and *regardless*.
inter, intra
As a prefix, *inter* means "between" or "among" (Examples: *international, intermarry*); *intra* means "inside of" or "within" (Examples: *intramural, intramuscular*).
is when, is where
It is ungrammatical to use an adverbial clause after a linking verb. Do not misuse in definitions and explanations.
INCORRECT: A simile *is when* two essentially unlike things are compared.
CORRECT: A simile is the comparison of two unlike things.
its, it's
*Its* is the possessive case of the pronoun *it*; *it's* is a contraction of *it is*. *It's* a wise child that knows *its* father.
K
kind of, sort of
Do not use as adverbs. Use *rather, somewhat, and so forth*.
kind of a, sort of a
Delete the *a*; use *kind of* or *sort of*.
What *kind of* (not *kind of a*) pipe do you smoke?
L
learn, teach
*Learn* means "to acquire knowledge." *Teach* means "to impart knowledge."
She could not *learn* how to work the problem until Mrs. Smith *taught* her the principles.
lend, loan
In formal writing, *loan* should be regarded as a noun and not as a verb. Will you *lend* me (not *loan*) three dollars?
I will go to the bank for a *loan*.
lead, led
Do not confuse. *Lead* as a noun is a metal. *Led, not lead*, is the past tense of the verb *lead*. 
like
Like may be used as a verb or a preposition. It should not be used as a conjunction. When like is not being used as a verb, it should be followed by a substantive that is its object. The word should not be used to introduce a clause.
Martha **likes** to play tennis. (verb)
Martha plays tennis **like** a professional. (preposition)
NOTE: "Like a professional" is a prepositional phrase used as an adverb modifying the verb **plays**.
Martha plays **as though** (not **like**) she enjoys the game.
**likely, liable**
Use **likely** to express probability; use **liable**, which may have legal connotations, to express responsibility or obligation.
You are **likely** to have an accident if you drive recklessly. Since your father owns the car, he is **liable** for damages.

loose
**Loose** is a frequent misspelling of **lose**. **Loose** is an adjective; **lose** is a verb. She wore a **loose** and trailing gown.
Speculators often **lose** their money.
**lot of, lots of**
Do not use in the sense of much or many.

M
**mad**
Do not use as a substitute for **angry**. **Mad** should be used only to mean "insane."
At the beginning of the play, Hamlet seemed **angry with (not mad at)** his mother. Later in the play, Hamlet seems to be **mad**; many critics believe his **madness** to be feigned.

**moral, morale**
**Moral** is either a noun or an adjective. **Morale** is a noun and has to do with mental or emotional condition that demonstrates itself in confidence, enthusiasm, cheerfulness, discipline, and willingness to perform assigned tasks.
What is the **moral** of that story? (noun)
The **moral** man was not elected. (adjective) The **morale** of the platoon seems very high.

**most**
Do not use for **almost** in such expressions as the following: He is late for class **almost (not most)** every day.

**myself, yourself, himself, herself, it**
These words are reflexives or intensives, not strict equivalents of **I, me, you, he, she, him, her, or 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 Alice and **myself** had access to the safe.
But: Only Alice and I had access to the safe.

Nice
Do not use as a substitute for more exact words like attractive, modest, pleasant, kind, and so forth. Nice means "showing or marked by great precision and sensitive discernment (a nice distinction) or executed with delicacy, accuracy, or skill (a nice bit of craftsmanship)."

NUMBERS
There are several rules for using numbers that are appropriately placed in this glossary. These rules are followed in standard written English. There may be exceptions if one is writing technical reports that are filled with statistics or if one is writing dates, addresses, times, or the numbers of pages, chapters, and the like.

1. Write out numbers that can be expressed in one or two words: There were ten thousand people at the game. [not "10,000 people"] I drove ninety-five miles in two hours. [not "95 miles in 2 hours"]

NOTE: Rule one means that numbers from one to ninety-nine should normally be written out.

2. Use figures for numbers that cannot be written out in one or two words. CORRECT: There were 432 people in my chemistry class.

3. Do not begin a sentence with a number. INCORRECT: 350 people were on the ship.
CORRECT: On board the ship were 350 people.

4. Except in legal papers and in business contracts, do not repeat a written number with figures in parentheses.
INCORRECT: Jesus had twelve (12) disciples.
CORRECT: Jesus had twelve disciples.

5. Separate with a comma each group of three figures in a number of four or more digits. Exceptions for dates and addresses.
CORRECT: The car cost 12,375 dollars.
CORRECT: He lived at 2231 Whistlestop Road.

Of
The word of instead of have is unacceptable, especially in such expressions as could of, may of, might of, must of, should of, and would of. The correct forms are could have, may have, might have, must have, should have, and would have.

off of, inside of, outside of, out of
Omit the of.
He fell off (not off of) the building.
He waited outside (not outside of) the building. He jumped out (not out of) the window.

Only
Only should be placed as near as possible to the sentence element it modifies. Only may modify either words, phrases, or clauses.
INCORRECT: I only want a few minutes of your time.
CORRECT: I want only a few minutes of your time.
**P**

**parameter**
Informal for boundary, perimeter, or limit. Do not use.

**plan on**
Use *plan* followed by an infinitive rather than *plan on* followed by a gerund. I *plan* to leave early (not *plan on leaving*).

**prejudice, prejudiced**
Do not confuse the noun *prejudice* with its past tense form *prejudiced*. See also *suppose* and *use* for similar errors.

I was a victim of *prejudice* because the law was *prejudiced* against me.

**pretty**
Do not use *pretty* as an intensive.

I swim fairly well (not pretty well).

**principal, principle**
Use *principal* to mean "first in authority or importance." Use *principle* to mean "a rule" or "a truth." Both rule and principle end in -le.

What *principle* did you use in solving that problem?

Evelyn is a woman of high *principles*.

The *principal* speaker arrived late.

The *principal* of the high school resigned yesterday. The *principle* of justice is of *principal* importance.

**prophecy, prophesy**

*Prophecy* is a noun meaning "a prediction"; *prophesy* is a verb meaning "to predict."

**Q**

**quiet, quite**

*Quiet* means silence; *quite* means really or entirely.

**quote**

Do not use as a noun. *Quotation* is the noun.

The *quotation* (*not* *quote*) came from the Bible. I put his words in *quotation* marks (*not* *quotes*).

**R**

**reason is (was) because**

Do not use for *the reason is that. Because* should introduce an adverbial clause, not a noun clause used as a predicate nominative.

INCORRECT: The *reason* Henry enlisted *was because* he failed in college.

CORRECT: The *reason* Henry enlisted *was that* he failed in college.

CORRECT: Henry enlisted because he failed in college.

Note: To use *reason* and *because* together is redundant. It is illogical to use both words to say the same thing.

**recur, recurred, recurring, recurrence**
Do not substitute reoccur for recur.
INCORRECT: I hope that this kind of accident does not reoccur. CORRECT: I hope that this kind of accident does not recur.

**relate to**
Trite in the sense of "sympathetic with" or "responsive to." Do not use. INCORRECT: Athena related to Odysseus' problems.
CORRECT: Athena was responsive to Odysseus' problems.

**respectfully, respectively**
Respectfully means "showing proper respect"; respectively means "in the order designated or mentioned."
He respectfully thanked the president for his diploma.
Crossing the platform, he passed respectively by the speaker, the dean, and the registrar.

**S**
**shape**
Do not use as a substitute for condition.
INCORRECT: Henry was in good shape for the game. CORRECT: Henry was in good condition for the game.

**so**
Do not use so as a synonym for therefore. Do not use so as an intensive. So is properly used in combination with that.
INCORRECT: I thought that the football player was so handsome.
CORRECT: I thought that the football player was so handsome that I would like to date him.
INCORRECT: I was tired, so I went to bed. CORRECT: Because I was tired, I went to bed.

**some**
Do not use as a substitute for somewhat. I am somewhat better today.

**sometime, some time**
Sometimes is used adverbially to designate an indefinite point of time. Some time refers to a period or duration of time.
I will see you sometime next week.
I have not seen him for some time.

**start, first**
Do not use for beginning.
At the beginning (not start or first) of the epic, warriors are dying.

**stationary, stationery**
Stationary means "in a fixed position." Stationery is writing paper. Hint: The -er in stationery is like the -er in paper.

**story**
Do not use story as a substitute for more specific terms such as epic, poem, play, or novel. Use story only when referring to a short story. Do not confuse the terms epic, poem, play, novel, and story.

**suppose, use**
Do not confuse these words with the past tense forms. The medicine is **supposed** to relieve pain (not suppose). Anne **used** to arrive earlier (not use).

**sure and, try and**
Use sure **to** and try **to**
Be **sure to (not sure and)** notice the changes in the schedule.

**T**

**their, there**
These words are not interchangeable: *their* is the possessive form of they; *there* is either an adverb meaning "in that place" or an expletive.

Their dog is standing **there** by the flowers.

**There** it is in the corner. (adverb)
**There** are twenty-two people in the room. (expletive)

**time period**
*Time period* is redundant. Use either *time* or *period*, but not both.

**to, too, two**
Distinguish the preposition *to* from the adverb *too* and the numeral *two*. If it isn't **too** cold, I will take my **two** poodles **to** the park.

**try and**
See **sure and** above.

**U**

**unique**
*Unique* means "one of a kind"; therefore, it may not logically be compared. *Unique* should not be loosely used for unusual or strange.

She owns the most **unusual (not unique)** hat in town.

**up**
Do not add a superfluous *up* to verbs.

We **opened (not opened up)** the box and **divided (not divided up)** the money.

**use**
See the entry under *suppose, use*.

**W**

**wait on**
Do not use for *wait for. Wait on* correctly means "to serve." We **waited for (not waited on)** Carrie at the station.

**weather, whether**
*Weather* means "atmospheric conditions"; *whether* means "if." I do not know **whether** the *weather* will be fair or foul.

**where at**
The *at* is unnecessary. INCORRECT: Where is he at? CORRECT: Where is he?

**where to**
The *to* is unnecessary.
INCORRECT: Where are you going to? CORRECT: Where are you going?
**whose, who’s**
*Whose* is the possessive form of *who; who’s* is a contraction of *who is.*

**-wise**
A suffix that is overused in combinations with nouns, such as budget-wise, progress-wise, and business-wise. Do not use.

**would have**
Do not use *would have* as a substitute for had in an adverb clause beginning with if. INCORRECT: If I *would have* gone to bed earlier last night, I would not be so sleepy today. CORRECT: *If I had* gone to bed earlier last night, *I would* not be so sleepy today.

**would of**
Nonstandard for *would have.*

**Y**
**you, your**
Do not use *you* or *your* as an indefinite pronoun. INCORRECT: *You* should examine all of the issues. CORRECT: The voter should examine all of the issues. INCORRECT: *You* should change your oil frequently. CORRECT: Car owners should change their oil frequently.