

GLOSSARY OF USAGE

Presbyterian College English Department

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 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.

enthused

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.

I **feel** cold. The child **feels** bad. I **feel** sorry for Ted. I **feel** depressed. John **feels** sleepy.

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, itself

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.

N

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.

O

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, respectfully

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

Sometime 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.

14

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.