

Often Confused Words

Can & May

Can implies the physical capability to accomplish the task.

May implies that you have permission

To the question, "Can I leave the room?"

An answer could be, "I am sure you can, but you may not."

Good & Well

Good is either a noun or an adjective (modifies a noun).

Well is an adverb (modifies a verb).

Therefore, it is proper to say, "You did that very well."

It is possible to do good, but that means a positive force in the community.

Continuous & Continual

Continuous is on and on, over and over again with no respite.

Continual is over and over again with stopping points in between.

A dog that barks continuously would soon be hoarse and not be able to make a sound.

A dog that barks continually can keep up the noise all night.

Comprise & Compose

Comprise indicates that many make up one.

Compose indicates that one item is made of many parts.

The four food groups comprise a balanced diet.

A balanced diet is composed of the four food groups.

Affect & Effect

Affect is always a verb. It is used to indicate the object has been changed by something the subject has done.

Effect is usually a noun. It can also be a verb that is used in the place of *create*.

The moon strangely affected the colors.

The moon had a strange effect on the colors.

My new carpenter skills had a positive effect on the cabinets I made.

The whole idea was to effect a change in my attitude.

The effect of the rain was mud all over.

Imply & Infer

Imply is to involve as a necessary circumstance. A deed implies a doer. It also means to suggest something.

Infer is to derive by reasoning or to judge from evidence.

I infer from what you said that you think I am ignorant.

Yes, I meant to imply that.

Accurate & Precise

The difference between *Accurate* and *Precise* is conceptual and a matter of degree. To better describe the difference, let's talk about target shooting.

Accurate: If at 25 yards I can put ten .22 shots in an a 1½-inch diameter circle, I am shooting accurately.

Precise: However, if, by plan I can put those same ten shots and circle diameter in the center of the target, I am shooting precisely.

To shoot precisely, one must also shoot accurately, but the reverse is not true.

Convince & Persuade

One is *convinced* of an idea and *persuaded* to action. To put it a little more in perspective:

Persuade: Before I can *persuade* you to rob a bank,

Convince: I must first *convince* you that it is to your advantage to do so or that for some reason, in this particular case, it is acceptable

Healthy & Healthful

Healthy is the condition of a person, animal or plant. If one is not *healthy*, there is some degree of illness.

Healthful is an adjective that describes food or a way of life that is able to impart (give) health.

We not only want to eat food that is in good shape (*healthy*),

we also want to eat food that is *healthful* that is, providing or perpetuating health.

Hopefully & I hope

Hopefully is an adverb (modifies a verb). The most common misuse of this word is in what is called an *introductory adverbial phrase*. For example: *Hopefully*, I will be able to What is really being said is that what ever I am talking about doing, I am planning on doing it in a hopeful manner. — If *hopefully* is the correct word, what I am really saying is: *If I do this at all, I will be doing it while I am hoping to finish it quickly so I can get on to something that will be more fun.*

I hope is the correct construction. If I don't know if I will be able to do a task, I should say: *I hope* I will be able to

Its & it's

You might be surprised to know that even technical writers have a tough time with this pair. The one that looks most like a possessive is really a contraction. And, putting appearances aside, *its* is the possessive here in the same tradition as *his* and *hers*.

It's is short for "it is."

It's time to go if you want to get there on time.

Its shows ownership.

The dog guarded its bone from both man and beast.

A'int

You might be surprised to find out that *ain't* is really a word. It is a speakable contraction for *am not* (*am'nt*). Except for the Amish, *ain't* has fallen into disuse and become an indication of ignorance and low intelligence. Part of this is due to the fact that those who use it do so incorrectly — as a substitute for *isn't* instead of what it is: a contraction for *am not*.

Which is Correct?

All comments are welcomed.

All comments are welcome.

Perhaps the easiest solution is to change the phrase into an active voice instead of a passive voice. *We welcome all comments.*

The word *welcomed* implies how one would treat a guest.

Therefore, the second example is correct.

The job is completed.

The job is complete.

Completed is a participle and, as such, is properly used in the past perfect tense. *The job has been completed.* *Complete* is a predicate adjective describing the condition of the job and is correct.

If the keys are in the car, break the window.

If the keys are in the car, then break the window.

The first example is simple, direct, and easily understood. *If* and *then* are used together in syntax for some programming languages. They are also used together in philosophy logic sequences or if specific steps are being described.

Him and I are working together.

He and I are working together.

Him and me are working together.

The second example is correct because *he* and *I* are both in the subjective form of the pronouns in question. In the first example, *him* is in the objective form of the pronoun, and the sentence is incorrect. In the third example, both pronouns are in the objective form, and the sentence is incorrect.

This is between her and me.

This is between her and I.

This is between she and I.

The first example is correct because *her* and *me* are both in the objective form of the pronouns in question. In the second example, *I* is in the subjective form of the pronoun, and the sentence is incorrect. In the third example, both pronouns are in the subjective form, and the sentence is incorrect.