



UNIVERSITY OF  
PORTSMOUTH  
ASK - ACADEMIC  
SKILLS UNIT

## Some Commonly-confused Words.

This table takes you alphabetically through words which are often mixed up. It gives the word, then its part of speech, then its meaning, and finally an example of its usage.

Please note that only the most widespread meanings and uses of these words are used here: **each may have alternative meanings and usages.**

Word.	Part of speech.	Meaning.	Examples.
Adverse.	Adjective.	Having a negative or harmful effect.	Adverse publicity damaged the firm's reputation.
Averse.	Adjective.	Strongly disliking or opposed to something.	I am averse to advertising which is aimed at children.
Affect.	Verb.	To have an influence on something.	New legislation will affect company reporting procedures.
Effect.	Noun.	Result or outcome (of an influence).	The effect of these new requirements will be dramatic.
Alternate.	Adjective.	Every other time or thing.	They meet on alternate Fridays.
Alternative.	Adjective.	Another possibility.	An alternative solution is to walk.
Altogether.	Adverb.	In total; completely. As a whole.	Altogether, they have five dogs. Altogether, it was a good lecture. He stopped singing altogether.
All together.	2-word 'phrase'.	All in one place. All at once.	Put your notes all together. They all arrived at court together.
Appraise.	Verb.	To assess value or quality.	Candidates will be asked to appraise their own performance.
Apprise.	Verb.	To inform.	He was apprised of the crisis.
Censure.	Verb.	To express severe disapproval.	The CEO was censured for misinforming the shareholders.
Censor.	Verb.	To suppress something seen as unacceptable.	The findings of the investigation were censored by the Board.
Complement.	Verb.	To add to; to make improvements.	The new products complement the existing range.
Compliment.	Verb.	To express admiration.	They complimented the team's work.
Comprise.	Verb.	To consist of.	The report comprises five sections.
Compose.	Verb.	To write or create. To arrange parts. To make up a whole or part.	He composed the report in five sections. The Committee is composed of five MPs.
Consequently.	Adverb.	As a result of.	He saw a study tutor. Consequently, his writing and grades improved.

Subsequently.	Adverb.	After or following the previous event.	He saw his tutor. Subsequently, he studied hard.
Continual.	Adjective.	Happening frequently.	The department has been damaged by continual scandals.
Continuous.	Adjective.	Without interruption or changes.	A continuous white line means “no overtaking”. Continuous traffic monitoring is required.
Criterion.	Singular noun.	Standard used to judge something.	The key criterion here is customer satisfaction.
Criteria.	Plural noun.	Standards used to judge or decide.	Three criteria are used for this evaluation. The job applicant did not meet their criteria.
Discrete.	Adjective.	Separate or distinct.	The hotel has a discrete identity.
Discreet.	Adjective.	Careful so as to not attract attention.	The journalist made discreet enquiries about the leak.
Draft.	Noun.	Preliminary version.	He submitted the draft plan.
Draught.	Noun.	Current of cold air.	The draught comes through the door.
Elicit.	Verb.	To draw out (a response).	The aim of Question 5 was to elicit information about case law.
Illicit.	Adjective.	Forbidden or strongly disapproved of.	They were conducting an illicit affair.
Illegal.	Verb.	Against the law.	It is illegal to smoke in most enclosed spaces.
Unlawful.	Verb.	Against the rules (in a particular context).	Unfortunately, Mr. Bond, that is an unlawful move in chess.
Imply.	Verb.	Hinting. The writer or speaker implies.	The conclusion implies that politics affects this issue.
Infer.	Verb.	Using evidence and reasoning to conclude or deduce something. The reader or listener infers.	It was possible to infer that job losses were likely. Due to the strength of the evidence, we inferred that he was guilty.
Impractical.	Adjective.	Not useful or sensible.	The variety of languages spoken makes interviewing impractical.
Impracticable.	Adjective.	Impossible to carry out.	Difficulties with enforcement makes these traffic laws impracticable.
Its.	Pronoun.	Belonging to it.	The company actively markets its ethical standards.
It's, with an apostrophe.	Short form.	A contraction of “it is”. Avoid contractions.	It's difficult to assess performance using only this criterion.
Judicious.	Adjective.	Using good judgement.	Money should be spent judiciously.
Judicial.	Adjective.	Involving a court of law.	A judicial enquiry was carried out.
Less.	Adjective.	Not as much.	There would be less strife in the world if artists were in charge.
Fewer.	Adjective.	Not as many. Refers to amounts of things.	There were fewer problems with the second task.
Mitigate.	Verb.	To make less severe.	This step helped to mitigate inaccurate reporting.

Militate (against).	Verb.	To be a powerful factor in preventing something.	The current tax system militates against the proper redistribution of wealth.
Perpetrate.	Verb.	To carry out (a harmful action).	Many crimes are perpetrated by people who are drunk.
Perpetuate.	Verb.	To cause something to continue.	These stories perpetuated the myth.
Practice.	Noun.	To use or apply a method, belief or idea. Customary, habitual or expected procedures.	Their ideas were too expensive to put into practice. He practised his beliefs. It is common practice for pop singers to use autotune.
Practise.	Verb.	To repeat to gain or improve a skill. To carry out a profession.	She practised hard to become proficient. He began to practise law a year ago. She practised as a lawyer.
Precede.	Verb.	To come before.	John preceded Mary in the job.
Proceed.	Verb.	To continue as planned.	The lawyers proceeded with the case.
Prescribe.	Verb.	To recommend something beneficial. To state authoritatively. To do something as a rule.	The NHS prescribes a healthy diet. Classroom rules prescribe behaviour. The doctor prescribed antibiotics.
Proscribe.	Verb.	To forbid.	For athletes, steroids are proscribed.
Prevaricate.	Verb.	To act or speak in an evasive way.	When questioned, the Minister prevaricated.
Procrastinate.	Verb.	To put off doing something.	The IMF is likely to procrastinate until it is too late.
Principal.	Adjective.	The most important.	The principal aim is to make the process more transparent.
Principle.	Noun.	Fundamental belief or quality.	One principle of the system is that it is morally right.
Stationary.	Adjective.	Not moving.	House prices are stationary.
Stationery.	Noun.	Writing materials.	Stationery costs less now.
Waive.	Verb.	To refrain from demanding.	In a gesture of goodwill, the hotel waived our parking fee.
Wave.	Noun.	A sudden increase in movement or feeling.	The crowd moved in waves. He felt a wave of happiness.

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