Here is a list of 50 common writing errors. Most are examples of word usage. Some are spelling. Some are grammatical rules. The list leaves plenty of room for argument. You may not agree with all these rulings. Differences often arise out of style. Consistency in style is important along with correct spelling, sound grammar, and precise word usage. Writers must master the basic rules before they can get to the subtleties of writing and editing.

The following list includes suggestions for word usage:

1. **Affect, Effect** — Generally, *affect* is the verb; *effect* is the noun.

   The letter did not a*ffect* the outcome.

   The letter had a significant *effect*.

   But *effect* is also a verb meaning to bring about.

   It is almost impossible to e*ffect* change."

2. **Afterward, Afterwards** — Use *afterward*. The dictionary allows use of *afterwards* only as a second form. The same thinking applies to *toward* and *towards*. Use *toward*.

3. **All right —** That's the way to spell it. The dictionary may list *alright* as a legitimate word, but it is not acceptable in standard usage, says Random House.

4. **Allude, Elude** — You *allude* to (or mention) a book. You *elude* (or escape) a pursuer.

5. **Annual** — Don't use *first* with it. If it's the first time, it can't be annual.

6. **Averse, Adverse** — If you don't like something, you are *averse* (or opposed) to it. *Adverse* is an adjective: *Adverse* (bad) weather, *adverse* conditions.

7. **Block, Bloc** — A *bloc* is a coalition of persons or a group with the same purpose or goal. Don't call it a *block*, which has some 40 dictionary definitions.

8. **Compose, Comprise** — Remember that the parts c*omprise* the whole, and the whole is *composed* of the parts. You *compose* things by putting them together. Once the parts are put together, the object is *comprised* of the parts.

9. **Couple of** — You need *of*. It's never "a couple tomatoes."

10. **Demolish, Destroy** — The means to do away with completely. You can't *partially demolish* or *partially destroy* something, nor is there any need to say *totally destroyed*.

11. **Different from** — Things and people are *different from* each other. Don't write that they are *different than* each other.

12. **Drown** — Don't say someone *was drowned* unless an assailant held the victim's head under water. Just say the victim *drowned*.

13. **Due to, Owing to, Because of** — The last is preferred. The others are colloquialisms.

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Wrong — The game was canceled *due to* rain.

Stilted — *Owing to* rain, the game was canceled.

Right — The game was canceled *because of* rain.

14. **Ecology, Environment** — They are not synonymous. *Ecology* refers to the study of the relationship between organisms and their environment.

    Right — The laboratory is studying the *ecology* of man and the desert.

    Right — Animal *ecology* is a subject of interest these days.

    Wrong — Even so simple an undertaking as maintaining a lawn affects *ecology*.

    Right — Even so simple an undertaking as maintaining a lawn affects our *environment*.

15. **Either** — It means one or the other, not both.

    Wrong — Lions were on *either* side of the door.

    Right — Lions were on each side of the door.

    Right — You can catch the bus on *either* side of the street.

16. **Fliers, Flyers** — Airmen are *fliers*. Handbills are *flyers*.

17. **Flout, Flaunt** — They aren't the same words; they mean completely different things, and they're very commonly confused. *Flout* means to mock, to scoff, or to show disdain for. *Flaunt* means to display ostentatiously.

18. **Funeral service** — A redundant expression. A funeral is a service.

19. **Head Up** — People don't *head up* committees. They head them.

20. **Hopefully** — One of the most commonly misused words, in spite of what the dictionary may say. *Hopefully* should describe the way the subject feels.

    Hopefully, I shall present the plan to the president. (This means I will be hopeful when I do it.)

    But it is something else again when you attribute hope to a nonperson

    Hopefully, the war will end soon. (This means you hope the war will end soon, but it is not what you are writing. What you mean is this: "I hope the war will end soon.")

21. **Imply, Infer** — The speaker *implies*. The hearer *infers*.

22. **In advance of, Prior to** — Use *before*; it sounds more natural.

23. **It's, Its** — *Its* is the possessive; *it's* is the contraction of *it is*.

    Wrong — What is *it's* name?

    Right — What is *its* name? *Its* name is Fido.

Right — *It's* the first time he's scored tonight.

Right — *It's* my coat

24. **Lay, Lie** — *Lay* is the action word; *lie* is the state of being.

    Wrong — The body will *lay* in state until Wednesday.

    Right — The body will *lie* in state until Wednesday.

    Right — The prosecutor tried to *lay* the blame on him.

    However, the past tense of *lie* is *lay*.

    Right — The body *lay* in state from Tuesday until Wednesday.

    Wrong — The body *laid* in state from Tuesday until Wednesday.

    The perfect tense of *lie* is *lain*.

    Right — The body *has lain* in state since Tuesday.

    Wrong — The body *has laid* in state since Tuesday.

    The past and the perfect tenses of *lay* is *laid*.

    Right — He *laid* the pencil on the pad.

    Right — He *had laid* the pencil on the pad.

    Right — The hen *laid* an egg.

25. **Leave, Let** — *Leave alone* means to depart from or cause to be in solitude. *Let alone* means to be undisturbed.

    Wrong — The man had pulled a gun on her, but Mr. Jones talked him into *leaving* her alone.

    Right — The man had pulled a gun on her, but Mr. Jones talked him into *letting* her alone.

    Right — I saw that Jim was asleep, so I decided to *leave* him alone.

26. **Less, Fewer** — If you can separate items in the quantities being compared, use *fewer*. If not, use *less*.

    Wrong — The Rams are inferior to the Vikings because they have *less* good linemen.

    Right — The Rams are inferior to the Vikings because they have *fewer* good linemen.

    Right — The Rams are inferior to the Vikings because they have *less* experience.

27. **Like, As** — Don't use *like* for *as* or *as if*. In general, use *like* to compare with nouns and pronouns; use *as* when comparing with phrases and clauses that contain a verb.

    Wrong — Jim blocks the linebacker *like* he should.

Right — Jim blocks the linebacker *as* he should.

Right — Jim blocks *like* a pro.

28. **Marshall, Marshal** — Generally, the first form is correct only when the word is a proper noun: John *Marshall*. The second form is the verb form: Marilyn will *marshal* her forces. And the second form is the one to use for a title: Fire *Marshal* Stan Anderson, Field *Marshal* Erwin Rommel.

29. **Mean, Average, Median** — Use *mean* as a synonym of *average*. Each word refers to the sum of all components divided by the number of components. *Median* is the number that has as many components above it as below it.

30. **Nouns** — A growing trend uses nouns as verbs. Resist it. *Host*, *headquarters*, and *author*, for instance, are nouns, even though the dictionary may acknowledge that they can be used as verbs. If you do, you'll come up with a monstrosity like this:

Headquartered at his country home, John Doe hosted a party to celebrate the book he had authored.

31. **Oral, Verbal** — Use *oral* when use of the mouth is central to the thought; the word emphasizes the idea of human utterance. *Verbal* may apply to spoken or written words; it connotes the process of reducing ideas to writing. Usually, it's a *verbal* contract, not an *oral* one, if it's in writing.

32. **Over, More than** — They aren't interchangeable. *Over* refers to spatial relationships:

The plane flew over the city.

***More than* is used with figures:**

In the crowd were more than 1,000 fans.

33. **Parallel construction** — Thoughts in series in the same sentence require parallel construction.

Wrong — The union delivered demands for an increase of 10 percent in wages and to cut the work week to 30 hours.

Right — The union delivered demands for an increase of 10 percent in wages and for a reduction in the work week to 30 hours.

34. **Peddle, Pedal** — When selling something, you *peddle* it. When riding a bike, you *pedal* it.

35. **Pretense, Pretext** — They're different, but it's a tough distinction. A *pretext* is that which is put forward to conceal a truth.

He was discharged for tardiness, but this was only a *pretext* for general incompetence.

A *pretense* is a false show, a more overt act intended to conceal personal feelings.

My profuse compliments were all *pretense*.

36. **Principal, Principle** — The first, dominant, or leading thing is a *principal*. A guiding rule or basic truth is a *principle*. *Principle* is a noun; *principal* may be a noun or an adjective.

37. **Redundancies** – Avoid repeating yourself. Here are some examples

Redundant	Correct
Easter Sunday	Easter
Incumbent Congressman	Congressman
Owns his own home.	Owns his home
The company will close down.	The company will close.
Jones, Smith, Johnson, and Reid were all convicted.	Jones, Smith, Johnson, and Reid were convicted.
Jewish rabbi	Rabbi
8 p.m. tonight	8 o'clock tonight or 8 p.m. today
During the winter months	During the winter
Both Reid and Jones were denied pardons.	Reid and Jones were denied pardons.
I am currently tired.	I am tired.
Autopsy to show the cause of death	Autopsy

38. **Refute** — The word connotes success in argument and almost always implies an editorial judgment. Use some other more neutral term.

39. **Reluctant, Reticent —** If he doesn't want to act, he is *reluctant*. If he doesn't want to speak, he is *reticent*.

40. **Say, Said** — The most serviceable words in the writer's language are the forms of the verb *to say*. Let a person *say* something, rather than *declare* or *admit* or *point out*. Never let the source *grin*, *smile*, *frown*, or *giggle* something.

41. **Slang** — Don't try to use contemporary slang. Usually a term is on the way out by the time we get it in print.

42. **Spelling** — It's basic. If writers and editors can't spell, we're in trouble.

43. **Temperatures** — They may get higher or lower, but they don't get warmer or cooler.

44. **That, Which** — *That* tends to restrict the reader's thought and direct it the way you want it to go; *which* is non-restrictive, introducing a bit of subsidiary information.

    The lawn mower *that* is in the garage needs sharpening. (Meaning: We have more than one lawn mower, and the one in the garage needs sharpening.)

    The lawn mower, *which* is in the garage, needs sharpening. (Meaning: We have one lawn mower, and it is in the garage. It needs sharpening.)

    The statue *that* graces our entry hall is on loan from the museum. (Meaning: We have more than one statue around here. The one in the hall is on loan from the museum.)

The statue, *which* graces our entry hall, is on loan from the museum. (Meaning: We have one statue around here. It is on loan from the museum.)

NOTE: Clauses using *which* take commas, signaling that they are not essential to the meaning of the sentence. Such non-restrictive or non-essential clauses are referred to as apposition. The use of *which* is not always necessary in non-essential clauses.

45. **Under way, Underway** — The words are *under way*, but don't say that something got *under way*. Say it started or began.

46. **Unique** — Something that is *unique* is the only one of its kind. It can't be *very unique*, or *quite unique*, or *somewhat unique*, or *rather unique*. Don't use it unless you really mean *unique*.

47. **Up** — Although the dictionary lists it as a verb, don't use it as such. Good writing uses another word instead.

    Wrong — The manager said he would *up* the price next week.

    Right — The manager said he would *raise* the price next week.

48. **Who, Whom** — This is a tough one. Generally, you're safe to use *whom* to refer to someone who has been the object of an action. *Who* is the word to use when somebody has been the actor.

    A 19-year-old woman, to *whom* the room was rented, left the window open.

    A 19-year-old woman, *who* rented the room, left the window open.

49. **Who's, Whose** — Though it incorporates an apostrophe, *who's* is not a possessive; it is a contraction for *who is*. *Whose* is the possessive.

    Wrong — I don't know *who's* coat it is.

    Right — I don't know *whose* coat it is.

    Right — Find out *who's* there.

50. **Would** — Be careful about using *would* when constructing a conditional past tense.

    Wrong — If Smith *would* not have had an injured foot, Jones *wouldn't* have been in the lineup.

    Right — If Smith *had* not had an injured foot, Jones *wouldn't* have been in the lineup.