In every sense, a good word guide'

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good word guide

sixth edition

The fast way to correct English – spelling, punctuation, grammar and usage

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GOOD WORD GUIDE
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INTRODUCTION

These days the term 'communicative skills' has become a vogue expression, being much in evidence in situations vacat columns and playing an important role in educational rethinking. In common with many voguish expressions of the age overuse has left it in danger of not being taken seriously. This is a great pity since the phenomenon which the term describes is of paramount importance in modern life.

Failure to communicate effectively is at the root of many social ills and misfortunes, from war to missed career opportunities, from industrial strife to broken relationships. If only we had been able to persuade the other party of our real intentions, what misunderstandings and conflict might have been averted.

Nowadays there is little excuse for poor communicative skills in those with a basic education, even in those who feel that they missed out at school in this particular area of education. Articulacy is not necessarily inborn; it can be acquired. Never before has there been such a wealth of self-help English language material available to ease the process of this acquisition.

The proliferation of English language reference books is a relatively recent occurrence. Not long ago the average family bookshelves probably stocked, if any reference books, an ancient Bible, a dog-eared, somewhat elderly dictionary, and perhaps a set of out-of-date encyclopedias. In many cases this state of affairs must have changed radically, judging from current sales of English language reference books.

Something of a revolution hit reference book publishing, brought about partly by the arrival of computerization and new technology and partly by the realization among publishers that reference books, although expensive to produce, represented less of a risk than other branches of publishing. There was probably also an element of response to demand as people came to realize the need for articulacy in the modern world.

For whatever reasons, bookshop shelves have become positively crammed with a wide range of attractive, up-to-date English language reference books, most of them extremely reasonably priced. At first most of these were English language dictionaries but soon a wider selection of books joined them. The net result was that the promotional activities involved in bringing these reference wares to the notice of the public made it difficult for people not to be aware of an important fact — that language is subject to change. Newspapers revelled in providing their readers with selected lists of the 'new English', the more bizarre the better.

The speed at which new words are added to the language nowadays is overwhelming, but it is not only the vocabulary that is subject to change. As attitudes and conventions change other areas of language change with them — stylistics, usage, and even, in some cases, pronunciation.

It is all too easy to feel marooned in this sea of change. While the importance of
communicative skills cannot be denied, many people find it difficult to set about acquiring them. Getting to grips with something as amorphous as the English language can be a daunting task, particularly for those whose formal education omitted to convey much about the structure or grammar of the language.

Dictionaries obviously provide a great deal of self-help with regard to language but their contribution is frequently restricted to meaning, spelling, or pronunciation. People seeking to extend their competence in the use of English require more varied and in-depth assistance.

Thesauruses are another great boon to those wishing to improve their standard of articulacy but here again they are far from providing all the solutions. Although would-be writers or speakers will undoubtedly find thesauruses a wide range of inspirational words with which to clothe ideas, they might well feel in need of some guidance as to how exactly these words should be used.

In the present age much more emphasis than hitherto is placed on the importance of being able to produce a high standard of English, whether oral or written. Formerly this aspect tended to be neglected in favour of highly developed reading and interpretative skills but this is now being rectified in these days of mass communication.

Participation in the communication media, for example, is no longer restricted to a few highly educated experts. Audience participation has extended from the realms of the stage to the realms of radio and television and beyond them to the dizzying heights of chat rooms and web forums on the Internet. Indeed one wonders what local low-budget radio stations would do without the phone-in contributions of the man/woman in the street, not to mention the chat show featuring the local celebrity who has published a first novel, climbed Everest, or lost more weight than anyone else in the community. All manner of things are of interest to the media.

In order to improve one's oral and written skills it is important to have more than just a dictionary and a thesaurus as self-help material. Of immense help are books that offer guidance in the use of language, particularly those which show language in action by including example sentences or phrases.

Such books provide very valuable ground rules on which to base one's own English usage. Few of us can rely entirely on instinct or even on memory when it comes to the English language for it is full of quirks and inconsistencies. Even the most educated benefit from having a standard authority to fall back on.

Language reference books these days are less didactic than they were. In general we have moved on from the times when they were entirely prescriptive in their comments on language. Now most of them adopt a more descriptive role, restricting themselves to stating what is actually happening in language rather than dictating what ought to be happening.

Inevitably there are people who are unhappy with this change of emphasis. There is a school of thought prevalent mainly among older people which seeks to impose a kind of restriction on language that is no longer imposed on other areas of life. It is as if, in an age of uncertainty and kaleidoscopic change, they look to language to provide a safe, unchanging structure.
This places an impossible burden on language. It does not exist in a vacuum but simply reflects what is happening in society and the world around. If we do not like the words, we probably do not like the events but it is difficult to hold back the tide of change.

At the very least we cannot stem the flow of vocabulary additions which are created in response to new inventions, new discoveries, and new concepts. New labels have to be found and so are born camorders, E-numbers, genetic engineering, and teleshopping, to name but a few of the new words that are invading the language from every area of human activity. The development of the World Wide Web and the revolution in communications it has brought about has proved a particularly powerful engine for linguistic innovation, spawning hosts of new acronyms, technical terms, and slang words, as well as promoting creative attitudes towards the use of grammar and symbols.

Language change is not confined to new vocabulary additions. Sometimes the old gets recycled in a new form as words alter their meaning in some way. The classic example is, of course, the word gay, which has almost entirely lost its 'merry' associations - except in literature written before the present day - in favour of the modern meaning of 'homosexual'.

There are, however, a growing number of other instances of language change, several based on misconception or error. Hopefully was an early example when it came to mean 'it is to be hoped that' as well as 'with hope'. Now disinterested is frequently to be found meaning 'not interested' as well as 'unbiased'. There is now a very fine line to be drawn between error and alternative usage - and sometimes the former becomes the latter.

Data, for example, as the plural of datum should come accompanied by a plural verb but it is now frequently seen in the presence of a singular verb, particularly in the field of information technology. The same fate has befallen media. It is no longer thought of as simply the plural of medium but as a word in its own right. As such it is increasingly accompanied by a singular, rather than a plural, verb.

Educational trends frequently have an effect on the state of the language. With the virtual demise of the teaching of classics in schools a knowledge of Latin and Greek in relation to the English language is now quite a rare phenomenon among younger people. So is born the puzzlement over medium/media and datum/data and the confusion over stadia/stadiums and referendums/referenda.

The creative writing phase in primary schools was the forerunner of many spelling problems and even more grammatical problems. It is, of course, a good thing to encourage creativity and self-expression, but some knowledge of the structure of the language is necessary if one is to use it with confidence and skill. With the introduction of such measures as the Literacy Hour in schools, significant attempts have been made in recent years to restore good standards in reading and writing, including the correct use of grammar, but what is done cannot be undone and there remain generations to whom formal knowledge of linguistic principles is a closed book.

This has undoubtedly affected modern English as it is used by the man/woman in
the street. It may offend purist ears but _less bottles of milk_ is challenging _fewer bottles of milk_ for supremacy in terms of frequency.

Then there is the nervousness about _me_ and _I_. There is a general—and erroneous—feeling that _I_ is much more polite and _more correct_ than _me_ in all contexts. This accounts for the _between you and I_ which so offends those brought up on a diet of parts of speech and parsing.

Prepositions in English are the source of much confusion. Should it be _different from_ or _different to_? For that matter should _accompanied_ be followed by _with or by_? Is either possible and, if so, which is correct in which context?

As _formal_ language training has diminished and public communication has increased, language has become less and less rigid and the distinction between the linguistically correct and the linguistically incorrect has become blurred. But we are not yet at the stage where anything goes; let us hope we never reach it. I think that _most_ of us would prefer a few guidelines to a linguistic free-for-all.

The trouble is that it is difficult to establish such guidelines when the language is in a state of flux. As has already been suggested it is difficult to pigeonhole language into the _correct_ and the _incorrect_. The categories are often too black and white; some shades of grey are sometimes necessary.

In any area where extremes are involved it is often advisable to take the middle course. So it is with language, provided the rationale and the _terms of reference_ are clearly explained. By taking such a course and explaining the options you may not please everyone but, on the other hand, you are unlikely to offend everyone.

The _Good Word Guide_, one of the _most_ wide-ranging English language reference books available, presents the reader with the facts associated with the relevant words and makes recommendations rather than laying down didactic rules. Where a _supposed_ alternative is in fact still generally considered wrong this is clearly stated, but where acceptable alternatives exist these are also stated together with the justifications for these.

Sometimes distinctions have to be made between the habits of the consciously careful users who wish to achieve absolutely correct and elegant English and those of the run-of-the-mill users who simply wish to get their basic message across as speedily and as painlessly as possible. A distressing number of us fall into this latter category although on special occasions, when we are out to impress, we try to mend our ways.

The said special occasions are usually _formal_ occasions when we dress up not only ourselves but our language also. _Forms_ of language associated with particular social situations are called registers. Thus in a _formal_ situation a _formal_ register of language is used.

Many of the entries in the _Good Word Guide_ distinguish between _formal_ and _informal_ registers. The _formal/informal_ distinction is often, although not always, between written and spoken English. We tend to be at our _most formal_, linguistically speaking, when we are writing letters of a business nature, while _informal_ English is kept for chatty written or keyed communications with friends and family or everyday conversation. It is important to remember that _informal_ English is neither incorrect nor less correct as long as it is the appropriate register for the context.
The Good Word Guide takes language as it finds it and acts as a navigator through the many potential hazards. All problematic areas are dealt with and explained in a way that is readily understandable by all users. Giving help with language is of very little use if the help itself is more difficult to comprehend than the original linguistic problem.

It tackles two types of spelling difficulty — words that for some reason present problems in themselves and words which are problematic because they are likely to be confused with other words that resemble them. Into the first category come such words as antihistamine, disappoint, innocuous, privilege, and wholesome, while the second category covers such duos as bloc/block, dual/duel, principal/principle, and stationary/stationery. This edition of the Guide also includes words and expressions of foreign origin which frequently present spelling and pronunciation problems. Examples include bête noire and tête-à-tête.

Of course the Guide does not confine its help with pronunciation to foreign words. The editor has been conscious of the fact that knowing how to pronounce words correctly is essential for confident public speaking, whether in the area of business or leisure. Thus words such as Celtic, dynasty, flaccid, irrevocable, status, and many more are listed to save you from red-faced stumbling.

Many people find difficulty with punctuation and so hesitate to launch into print. The Good Word Guide gives advice on many aspects of this from the basic comma and paragraph to the more esoteric semicolon. Potential authors will find it invaluable.

Grammar is a cause of nervousness in many, mostly because they have never been taught the rudiments of it. One of the great advantages of this book is that the grammatical information is presented in an easily comprehensible, rapid-to-use form as it unfolds the mysteries of the preposition, the conjunction, and the rest.

If your particular linguistic problem centres on usage you will find that the Good Word Guide gives sensible answers to a wide range of possible queries, often incorporating examples of the particular words showing the usual context. Should you use converse or inverse, impinge or infringe, soluble or solvable? A quick scan through the alphabetical listing will reveal the answer. Although mindful of the fact that print gives a kind of credence to any statement, the editor has sensibly given examples of incorrect usage on occasion to contrast with the correct form.

One of the most innovative features of this book is the concentration on what are known as buzz words or vogue words, expressions which, however much we may deprecate them, suddenly leap into fashionable prominence in the general language, often from specialist sources. In many cases objections to buzz words lie not with the words themselves but with their overuse, the user rather than the word being at fault. Too many of us jump on the linguistic bandwagon and reach for the vogue word of the day instead of spending time and effort in finding the more appropriate expression.

What is to be done with buzz words? Should we ignore them and hope they will fade rapidly? Should we embrace them enthusiastically and risk heaping criticism on ourselves? Should we take the middle course and use them sparingly and effectively? The choice is of course yours but this particular volume advocates this last course of action. Appreciate their merits but do not abuse them by overusing them.
Introduction

If you find yourself tempted by any of them put temptation behind you by consulting the Guide for suggested suitable alternatives. Armed with it you will have no excuse for peppering your prose with the bottom line, catalyst, gravitas, downsizing, leading-edge, parameter, matrix, online, and so on unless the context demands it. Many of them are best left to their specialist use. A severe head injury is traumatic; missing a bus is just annoying.

This latest edition of the Good Word Guide has fourteen tables: Animals (showing words for the male, female, and young), Collective nouns (do you know the collective noun for a group of crows?), Collectors and enthusiasts (what is a sericulturist interested in?), Countries and peoples (what is the adjective derived from Burkina Faso?), Eponymous words (showing words derived from the names of people), Foreign words and phrases (for those looking for that certain je ne sais quoi), Non-exist terms (e.g. firefighter instead of fireman/firewoman), Phobias, Prefixes, Smiles, Smiley, Suffixes, Text messaging and Verbs (irregular verbs).

The Good Word Guide is a book for everyone and truly is an invaluable ready reference to English today. Whether you are using it for guidance with spelling, punctuation, pronunciation, or usage — or simply to settle or cause language disputes—you will quickly come to regard it as an old friend. Just remember one thing. Do not blame the book for what is happening to the language.

Betty Kirkpatrick
Edinburgh
GUIDE TO
PRONUNCIATION

a as in bad
ã as in arrest
ah as in father
air as in dare
ar as in carpet
år as in burglar
aw as in saw
ay as in may
b as in bed
ch as in cheese
d as in dig
dh as in these
e as in get
e’ as in open
ee as in see
er as in here
er as in bird
ër as in butcher
ew as in few
ewr as in pure
f as in fit
g as in go
h as in hat
i as in it
í as in pencil
í as in try
j as in jam
k as in keep
kh as in loch
ks as in mix
kw as in quiz
l as in le

m as in mad
n as in nod
ng as in sing
n(g) as in restaurant
o as in hot
ô as in cannon
ö as in no
oi as in boy
oor as in zoo
oor as in cure
or as in tore
ôr as in doctor
ow as in now
p as in pat
r as in rim
rr as in marry
s as in sat
sh as in ship
t as in take
th as in thin
u as in up
ú as in crocus
uu as in push
v as in van
w as in water
y as in yes
yoo as in unite
yoor as in urine
yr as in tire
z as in zoo
zh as in treasure

stressed syllables are shown in
italics: [œiètre]
**a or an?** A is the form of the indefinite article used before words or abbreviations that are pronounced with an initial consonant sound, regardless of their spelling; *an* is used before words that begin with a vowel sound: • a light • an LCD screen • a unit • an uncle • a horse • an heir • a one-armed bandit • an ostrich • a seat • an SOS • a ewe • an egg • a UFO • an IOU.

- The use of *an* before words that begin with an *h* sound and an unstressed first syllable, such as *hotel, historic, hereditary, habitual,* etc., is optional. Nowadays, the preference is increasingly to use a followed by *hotel,* etc., with the *h* sounded, rather than *an* followed by *hotel,* etc., with the *h* not pronounced.

- *A* and *an* are usually unstressed. The pronunciations [aɪ] and [æn] are used only for emphasis: • He told you to take a biscuit, not the whole plateful! In this example a would be pronounced [aɪ].

**abbreviations** Abbreviations are useful space-saving devices. They are used heavily both in informal writing and in technical or specialized writing, but less in formal writing. Some abbreviations stand for more than one word. Nowadays, it is better to spell these out unless the context makes the meaning clear. • He was a CO in the war is confusing, as the abbreviation means both 'commanding officer' and 'conscientious objector'.

- The main problems with abbreviations concern punctuation. The modern tendency is to omit full stops whenever possible: • BBC • AD • D H Lawrence • Prof, and so on. Full stops are increasingly being omitted from capital abbreviations: • USA • EU, and they are always omitted from acronyms: • NATO • UNESCO. When an abbreviation is a contraction (i.e. the final letter of the abbreviation corresponds with the final letter of the word) there is usually no full stop: • Mr • Dr • Rd. There is more likely to be a full stop when the abbreviation is just the first part of the word: • Rev. • Feb., although here too the modern trend is to omit it. Abbreviated names can take a full stop or not: • C.S. Lewis • A.S. Byatt. There should be no full stop if a capital letter does not stand for a whole word: one should not write *T.V.* (television) or *D.N.A.* (deoxyribonucleic acid) as tele- and deoxy- are not complete words. There are usually no full stops in the abbreviations of weights and measures: • km • oz and never in chemical symbols: • Fe • Cu.

- Apostrophes are no longer generally used for shortened forms that are in general use: • bus • flu • phone • photo • vet.

- Most abbreviations form their plurals with an *s:* • JPs • PhDs. A few abbreviations form their plurals by doubling: • pp (pages) • ll (lines).

- Most abbreviations (except for acronyms) are pronounced by spelling out the letters. When preceded by the indefinite article, those abbreviations that begin with a vowel sound take an: • an EC directive • an LSE graduate and those beginning with a consonant sound take a: • a DBE • a UDR spokesman.

See also **ACRONYMS.**

**aberration** This word, meaning 'deviation from the norm': • a temporary mental aberration, is sometimes misspelt. Note the spelling: a single *b* and *-r-* as in error.

**ability see CAPABILITY, CAPACITY or ABILITY?**

- **-able** or **-ible**? Both forms of this suffix are added to words to form adjectives, -able being the suffix that is productive and the more frequently used: • washable • comfortable • collapsible.

- The form -able is always used for words composed of other English words: • drinkable; -ible being used for some words of Latin origin: • credible • defensible.

- On whether to retain the silent final *-e* in words such as likeable, see **SPELLING 3** and individual entries.

- The suffix *-able* may be active or (more frequently) passive in usage, in such words as washable, eatable, dispensable, etc. It has the passive meaning of 'able to be washed, eaten, dispensed (with), etc.' In the adjectives changeable, perish-
able, etc. It has the active meaning of 'able (or likely) to change, persist, etc.' The suffix is frequently used to produce new words, such as
macro-wave-able, meaning 'able to be cooked in a microwave oven', and photocopy-able. Some people dislike the overuse of words coined in
this way, preferring can it be found? is it findable?, for example.

abled The term abled is sometimes used as
a synonym for 'abled-bodied'; it is also used
in alternatives for 'disabled' or 'handicapped': differently abled • Marshall rejects
the term 'disabled' for these children... She
calls them 'untypically differently abled' (Daily
Telegram). Users feel that such phrases
project a more positive image of people
with disabilities, but these alternatives are
widely disliked as much by the supposed
beneficiaries as by the public at large.

See also ABLEISM; CHALLENGED; DISABLED;
POLITICAL CORRECTNESS.

ableism The term ableism refers to discrimi-
nation against people with disabilities,
especially in employment and in the pro-
vision of facilities in public places.

See also POLITICAL CORRECTNESS.

Aboriginal or Aborigine? Either noun
may be used in referring to a member of
the indigenous people of Australia who
settled there prior to the arrival of Euro-
pean settlers, but Aboriginal is now gener-
ally preferred to Aborigine by the people
themselves.

abound The verb abound is followed by the
preposition with or in: • The river
abounds with [or in] salmon.

about Care should be taken in using about
in describing the essential characteristics of
something or as an intensifier after a neg-
ative, as many people consider such usages
acceptable only in informal contexts: •
Being a teenager today is all about appear-
ance. • She was not about to give in to his
demands at this late stage.

See also AROUND or ABOUT?

above or over? The preposition above
means 'at a higher level than'; over means
'vertically or directly above', 'on top of' or
'across': • He raised his hand above his head. •
She held the umbrella over her head. • There's
a mark on the wall above the radiator. • I've
put my towel over the radiator. • The aero-
plane flew above the clouds. • The aeroplane
flew over Southampton.

In many contexts the two words are inter-
changeable: • I hung the picture above/over the
mantelpiece. • Our bedroom is above/over the
dining room.

The use of above as a noun or adjective, with
reference to something previously mentioned, is
disliked by some users but acceptable to most: •
You will need several items in addition to the
above. • Please quote the above reference num-
ber on all correspondence.

abridgment or abridgement? This word, mean-
ing 'a shortened version of a work
such as a book', may be spelt abridgment or
abridgement. Both spellings are fully ac-
ceptable.

abscess This word, meaning 'a collection
of pus surrounded by inflamed tissue', is
often misspelt. Note the sc at the beginning
of the second syllable.

absence This word is sometimes mispelt,
the most frequent error being the substitu-
tion of -isc- for the -isc-, as in abices. Note also
the -ence ending.

absolutely Some users dislike the frequent
use of absolutely in place of 'yes'. Others feel
that the adverb is overused as an intensifier,
in the sense of 'completely': • it is absolutely
dignified.

The pronunciation of absolutely varies according
to its meaning. In normal adverbial use it is stressed
on the first syllable [abs-ə-loʊt-ə], in the sense of 'yes'
it is stressed on the third syllable [abs-ə-loʊt-ə].

absolve The verb absolve is followed by
the preposition of or from: • They absolved us
of [or from] blame.

absorption Note the spelling of this word.
The final -b of the verb absorb changes to
-p- in the derived noun.

abstention or abstinance? Both these
nouns are derived from the verb abstain,
meaning 'refrain' or 'restrain from voting'.
The noun abstention is chiefly used in the
second of these senses: • 24 votes for the
motion, 16 against, and 5 abstentions. Abstain-
ence refers to the act or practice of abstan-
ing, often from something that is enjoyable
but possibly harmful: • abstinance from
alcohol • total abstinance from sexual inter-
course.
abstractedly or abstractly? Abstractedly is derived from the adjective abstracted, meaning 'lost in thought': • He stared abstractedly out of the window. The adverb abstractedly, meaning 'in the abstract', is less frequent in usage.

abuse or misuse? The noun abuse denotes wrong, improper, or bad use or treatment; the noun misuse, denoting incorrect or unorthodox use, is more neutral: • the abuse of power • child abuse • the misuse of words • misuse of the club's funds.

• The same distinction applies to the verbs abuse and misuse: • to abuse a privilege • to misuse one's time.

In some contexts the two words are interchangeable: • The misuse of drugs among teenagers is but one aspect of drug abuse currently being examined by government bodies. • He predicted that it would not lead to an upsurge in alcohol misuse ... But Action on Alcohol Abuse attacked the move at a time of increased medical concern about excessive drinking (Daily Telegraph).

The word abuse also refers to insulting language: • The president was abused by the crowd.

• The pickets shouted abuse at the strikers.

As in the word use, the final [s] sound of the nouns abuse [əbˈsuːs] and misuse [ˈmaɪzəs] changes to [z] in the verbs.

See also SUBSTANCE ABUSE or SUBSTANCE MISUSE?

abyssal This word, meaning 'very bad; dreadful': • abyssal weather, is sometimes misspelt. The word comes from abyss, hence the y in the spelling.

academic The adjective academic is widely used in the sense of 'theoretical': • an academic question • of academic interest only, but some people object to its frequent use in place of irrelevant: • Whether he wins this race or not is academic, because he is already several points ahead of his nearest rival.

accede or exceed? Accede, used in formal contexts, means 'agree'; exceed means 'go beyond' or 'be greater than': • They will accede to our demands. • Do not exceed the speed limit.

• The two verbs are similar in pronunciation but quite different in spelling; accede [əkˈsiːd] ends in -ed; exceed [ɪkˈsiːd] ends in -eed.

The verb accede is usually followed by to; it can also be used in the expression to accede to the throne, meaning 'to become king (or queen)'. Compare to succeed to the throne, meaning 'to be the next person to become king or queen, especially as an inheritance'.

accelerate The word accelerate, meaning 'speed up', is sometimes misspelt. Note the -ce- and single l.

accent or accentuate? Both verbs can be used in the sense of 'to emphasize'. Accent usually refers to the act of stressing a sound in speech or music, whereas accentuate is used in a wider range of visual and abstract contexts: • He accentuated the word 'life'. • to accent the first beat in the bar • to accentuate an outline problem.

• The word accent is stressed on the second syllable [ˈækseɪt] when it is used as a verb and on the first syllable [ˈækʃənt] when it is used as a noun.

accents Accents are sometimes used on words that are now accepted into English, though the tendency is increasingly to omit them.

• Accents are generally used when they show the pronunciation of the word: the cedilla in façade shows that the c is soft, the acute accent on cliché shows that the word is pronounced [kliːʃ] not [kliʃ]. A circumflex accent on the o of role is unnecessary and is usually omitted.

accentuate see ACCENT or ACCENTUATE?

accept or except? These two verbs should not be confused, being virtually opposite in meaning. Accept means 'receive' or 'admit'; except, used in formal contexts, means 'exclude' or 'leave out': • She was accepted for the job. • He was excepted from the team. Accept only exists as a verb, whereas except may also be used as a preposition, meaning 'excluding', and as a conjunction, meaning 'if were not for the fact that' or 'otherwise than': • Everyone had to attend except head of department. • She did not pause except to pick up her hat. The two words are similar but not identical in pronunciation: accept is pronounced [ɪkˈsept] and except is pronounced [ɪkˈsept].

access The use of the word access as a verb is best restricted to the field of computing, where it means 'gain access to (stored information or a computer memory)'. • Customers will shortly be able to access this information with minimum delay through personal computer or mobile phone.
The extended use of the verb in general contexts is disliked by many users: • We often receive requests to access our membership lists and these are almost always refused (Club Lotus News).

access or accession? The noun access refers to the act, right, or means of approaching, reaching, entering, or using: • Access to the laboratory is restricted. The noun accession is derived from the verb accede (see ACCEDE or EXCEED?) and is most frequently used in the sense of 'becoming king (or queen)'. • Elisabeth II's accession (to the throne) in 1952.

access or excess? The noun access means 'entry' or 'opportunity to make use of something': • He obtained access to the building. • We hope to promote access to further education. It should not be confused with excess, which variously means 'surplus' or 'unrestricted behaviour': • The department has an excess of materials. • He abandoned himself to a life of excess.

* Note that in access the stress falls on the first syllable, while in excess the noun it falls on the second syllable.

accessible The adjective accessible, meaning 'easy to use, enter, or approach', is sometimes understood to have particular relevance to access for people whose mobility is impaired, specifically for people in wheelchairs: • The site is fully equipped with accessible toilets. • The brochure includes information about accessible holidays.

accessory or accessory? In British English, the spelling of this word in the sense 'supplementary attachment' is accessory: • ear accessory.

* In the legal sense of 'a person who incites another to commit a crime', the spelling is usually accessory, accessory being an older variant: • an accessory before the fact.

In American English, accessory is the spelling in all senses.

accommodation The word accommodation is often misspelt. Note the -cc- and -mm-.

accompany The passive verb to be accompanied may be followed by the preposition by or with, depending on the sense in which it is used: • She was accompanied by her friend. • His words were accompanied with by a gesture of impatience. In the first example the verb accompany means 'go somewhere with someone as a companion; escort', in the second it means 'supplement'.

* With is also used with the active verb accompany: • He accompanied his words with a gesture of impatience.

accountable The adjective accountable, meaning 'answerable', should be applied only to people: • Union leaders are accountable to the rank-and-file members. • We were accountable for their welfare.

* In other contexts the adjective is often better replaced by its synonym responsible: • An unexpected fall in demand was responsible for the company's financial problems.

The noun accountability is best avoided where responsibility would be adequate or more appropriate: • the individual responsibilities (not accountabilities) of the directors.

accumulative or cumulative? The adjective cumulative refers to something that gradually increases with successive additions: • the cumulative total • a cumulative effect. It should not be confused with accumulative, an adjective that is derived from the verb accumulate but is rarely used.

acetic see AESTHETIC, ASCETIC or ACETIC?

achieve This word is often misspelt. Note the -ie- spelling, which conforms to the rule 'i before e except after c'.

See also SPELLING 5.

acknowledgment or acknowledgement? This word may be spelt with or without the e after the g; both spellings are fully acceptable.

acoustics The word acoustic is often misspelt, the most frequent error being the doubling of the first c.

* For the use of acoustics as a singular or plural noun see -CS.

acquaint The verb acquaint is best avoided where tell would be adequate or more appropriate: • He acquainted me with his plans, for example, may be more simply expressed as he told me his plans.

* The passive form be acquainted with can often be replaced by know: • I am not acquainted with the rules.

Note the spelling of acquaint and its derivatives, particularly the presence and position of the letter c.
acquiesce The word *acquiesce*, meaning ‘agree or consent to something (especially against one’s inclination),’ is sometimes misspelt. Note the *-ue-* in the middle of the word and the *-ace* ending. The word is pronounced [əkwiˈes].

*acqurement* or *acquisition*? In the sense of ‘something acquired’. *Acqurement* is largely restricted to abilities or skills and *acquisition*, the more frequent word, to material things or people: • Fluency in spoken and written Japanese is one of her many *acquirements*. • He showed me his latest *acquisition*.

◆ Both nouns may be used to denote the act of acquiring: • the acquisition/acqurement of specialist knowledge • the acquisition/acqurement of wealth.

Note the spelling of *acqurement* and *acquisition*, particularly the *-c* before the *-qu*.

acquit The verb *acquit* is followed by the preposition of or on in the sense ‘acquit a person of (a charge)’: • She was acquitted of [or on] all charges, and of in the sense ‘acquit a person of (a crime)’: • She was acquitted of manslaughter.

acronyms An acronym is a word formed from the initial letters or syllables of other words: • OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) • radar (radio detecting and ranging).

◆ The punctuation of acronyms varies. The usual style is capitals without fullstops: • WHO • NIGAM, although some of the better-known acronyms are sometimes seen with only an initial capital: • NATO • AIDS/STDs. Acronyms which refer to some piece of technical equipment, rather than an organization: • sonar (sound navigation and ranging) • radar (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation) • scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus), become so accepted that they are written in lower-case letters like ordinary words and many people do not even realize that they are acronyms. Other acronyms have become so well-known that it is rare to hear their full names: • Naafi • Tomcat (theatre of operations missile continuous-wave anti-tank weapon).

Recently there has been a tendency to make acronyms correspond with actual English words: • SEAL (sea-air-land (US Navy)) • PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Act). The more appropriate the word to the organization or concept the better: • ASH (Action on Smoking and Health) • MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction). It sometimes seems almost as though organizations and systems are made to fit the acronyms, rather than vice versa: • In 1984, Holmes, the Home Office Large Major Enquiry System was set up. In spite of its name, Holmes is not an electronic version of the master detective, but a means of investigating crimes through computers (The Times).

The development of electronic communications in recent years has greatly increased the number of acronyms in daily use (see E-MAIL; NETSPEAK; TEXT MESSAGING).

See also DINKY; NIMBY; YUPPIE.

*acrylic* This word is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the *y*, not *i* in the middle of the word.

act or *action*? Both these nouns mean ‘something done’, but *action* tends to emphasize the process of doing whereas *act* denotes the deed itself: • Terrorism *act* has increased. • It was an act of terrorism.

◆ The use of the word action as a verb, meaning ‘take action on’ or ‘put into action’, is disliked by many people, including Fritz Speigl (Daily Telegraph), who criticized ‘the many new verbs spawned by the caring industry. They no longer do things. They “action” them.’

activate or *actuate*? Both words, meaning ‘make active or operative’, are acceptable, but careful users reserve *actuate* for more formal or technical contexts: • The young scientist *actuated* the machine. • The government decided to *actuate* the dormant security unit. • The system is *actuated* by a series of switches. *Activate* is preferred to *actuate* when referring to personal motivation: • The old man’s interest in the girl’s welfare was *actuated* by greed.

active An active verb is one in which the *subject* performs the action of the verb (compare *passive*). The sentence • The mechanic *mended* my car contains the active verb *mended*.

◆ Most clauses and sentences containing an active transitive verb can be converted into the passive: • My car was *mended* by the mechanic, but the result is sometimes clumsy or needlessly complicated.

actor or *actress*? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

actual Many people object to the frequent, redundant use of the adjective *actual*
simply for emphasis: • This is the actual place where the crash happened. • That is an actual Picasso.

* The word actual may, however, be used perfectly legitimately in, for instance, comparing real and projected totals: • The actual figure is probably much lower.

**actualize** The verb actualize, meaning 'make actual', is disliked by some users as an example of the increasing tendency to coin new verbs by adding the suffix -ize to nouns and adjectives: • They have actualized their plans.

See also -ize or -ise?

**actually** Many people object to the frequent use of the adverb actually where it adds nothing to the meaning of the sentence: • Actually, I prefer coffee to tea. • We weren’t actually very impressed by his performance. • She doesn’t live here, actually.

* In some contexts, however, actually may serve the useful purpose of contrasting what is actual or real with what is theoretical or apparent: • I know how to make a soufflé but I’ve never actually made one. • It sounds difficult but it’s actually quite easy.

See also in fact.

**actuate** see activate or actuate?

**acumen** In the traditional pronunciation of this word, which means 'the ability to make good judgments': sounds business acumen, the stress falls on the second syllable [əˈkjuːmən]. The pronunciation with the stress on the first syllable [aˈkjuːmən] is, however, more frequently heard.

**acute** see chronic

**AD** and **BC** The abbreviation AD, which stands for Anno Domini, is traditionally placed before the year number; BC, which stands for before Christ, always follows the year number: • The custom dates back to AD 1462. • The city was destroyed in 48 BC.

* In modern usage AD sometimes follows the year number: • The battle took place in 1127 AD.

It is strictly tautological to precede AD with in, since Anno Domini literally means 'in the year of the Lord', but the omission of in is generally considered to be unidomatic: • He died in AD 1042.

BC and AD are also applied to centuries, although the use of AD for this purpose is disliked by some people and is often unnecessary: • since the fourth century BC • until the ninth century AD.

The abbreviations are always written in capital letters (small capitals are sometimes used in printed text), with or without full stops (see also abbreviations).

Some contemporary writers prefer to use BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era), or PE (Present Era), to avoid the Christian connotations of BC and AD.

**address** Note the spelling of this word, particularly the -ad- and the -or- ending.

See also letter writing 1.

**adequate** The adjective adequate is followed by the preposition to or for: • Their income was no longer adequate to [or for] their needs.

**adherence** or **adhesion**? Both these nouns are derived from the verb adhere, meaning 'stick'. Adhesion is largely confined to the literal sense of the word, whereas adherence is used for the figurative senses of 'loyalty' or 'obedience': • the adhesion of the tape to the fabric • their adherence to the cause • strict adherence to the rules.

* In medical contexts adhesion is the abnormal union of usually separated body tissues, for example as a result of inflammation.

**ad hoc** The Latin phrase ad hoc denotes something that is made or done for a particular purpose, rather than as a general rule. It is most frequently used as an adjective: • an ad hoc decision • on an ad hoc basis.

* The phrase is also used as an adverb: • The committee will meet ad hoc, as needs arise. It is not usually written or printed in italics.

**ad infinitum** The Latin phrase ad infinitum means 'endlessly': • This series of events repeats itself ad infinitum.

**adjectives** An adjective is a word which provides information about a noun: • fat • blue • happy • intelligent • dirty. The main division of adjectives corresponds to the position that they take. Attributive adjectives come before a noun: • a stupid boy. Predicative adjectives follow a verb: • the sky is grey. Postpositive adjectives follow a noun: • the chairman elect.

* Of course, some adjectives can be used in all three positions: • a long walk • the sides are long • two yards long. Most can be used attributively and predicatively: • sweet tea • The tea is sweet. Some adjectives can only be attributive: • the principal
reason, not The reason is principal. Some can only be predicative: • The baby is awake, but not the awake baby. Some are used only in the postpositive position: • There were drinks galore.

Nouns can sometimes be used as attributive adjectives: • a glass bowl • a Missen plate • cotton shirts, and adjectives can be used as nouns: • the poor • the accused • the quick and the dead. Adjectives are also used in the place of adverbs: • They sell their goods dear. • It tastes delicious. Such words as: • fast • late • early function as both adjectives and adverbs.

Absolute adjectives are such words as: • entire • extreme • total • unique, which cannot be used in the comparative or superlative, and cannot be modified by words like very, utterly, or totally. They can, however, be modified by almost or nearly: • an almost total disaster • a nearly perfect round. Other absolute adjectives cannot be modified in any way: • a postgraduate student • a decoupage tree, but it is occasionally possible to modify an apparently absolute adjective for effect: • He looked very dead.

The overuse of adjectives should be avoided, particularly when they are tautologous: • true facts (see TAUTOLOGY). Care should be taken with choice of adjectives and the less informative ones should be avoided. He’s a nice man tells one very little about a man; he might be good-natured, sympathetic, witty, attractive, respectable, or none of these. Long strings of adjectives should also be avoided in ordinary speech or writing unless they are needed for a precise description: • a small brown one-eyed mongrel. In poetry several adjectives can be used to good effect: • A poor, weak, palsy-stricken, churchyard thing (Keats).

See also COMPARATIVE AND SUPERLATIVE:
Nouns.

adjourn This word, which means ‘stop for a short time’ and ‘go’, is sometimes misspelt. Note the d in front of the j, and the our, as in journey.

administer or administrate? Either verb may be used in the sense of ‘manage’, ‘supervise’, ‘control’, or ‘direct’, with reference to the work of an administrator: • She has administered/administrated the company since the death of her father.

• Administer also means ‘give’, ‘apply’, or ‘dispense’: • to administer first aid • to administer justice. Administer is not used in such contexts.

admissible This word, meaning ‘acceptable’ or ‘having the right to be admitted’, is sometimes misspelt. Note the -ible ending.

admission or admittance? Both these nouns mean ‘permission or right to enter’. Admission is the more frequent, admittance being largely restricted to formal or official contexts: • Admission is by ticket only. • No admittance. • He presents the picture of a boy for whom an early admission could well be advantageous. . . . Education officials say they blocked his admittance because class sizes at the school were too large (Sunday Times).

• Of the two words only admission may be used to denote the price charged or a fee paid for entrance.

The noun admission also means ‘confession’ or ‘acknowledgment’: • an admission of guilt • by her own admission.

admit In the sense of ‘confess’ or ‘acknowledge’ admit is generally used as a transitive verb: • He admitted his mistake. • I admitted that I had lied. • Do you admit writing this letter?

• The insertion of the preposition to in such contexts is disliked by many users: • He admitted to his mistake. • Do you admit to writing this letter?

Admit is followed by to in the sense of ‘allow to enter’ or ‘give access’: • We were not admitted to the club. • This gate admits to the garden. In the formal sense of ‘be open to’ or ‘leave room for’ admit is followed by of: • The phrase does not admit of a different interpretation.

admittance see ADMISSION OR ADMITTANCE?

ad nauseam The Latin phrase ad nauseam is used to refer to something that happens, is said, etc., again and again so that it is boring or irritating: • to discuss politics ad nauseam.

• Literally, the phrase means ‘to a sickening degree’.

adolescence This word is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the xe and the nc.

adopted or adoptive? The adjective adopted is applied to children who have been adopted; adoptive relates to adults who adopt another person’s child: • their adopted daughter • her adoptive parents.

• Careful users maintain the distinction between the two words.

adrenalin or adrenaline? Both spellings of this word, denoting a hormone secreted by the adrenal glands, are acceptable. In British English adrenaline is preferred; in
American English, adrenalin (also a trade-name). Another US alternative is epinephrine.

**adult** The noun adult may be stressed on either syllable, but the pronunciation [adult] is heard more frequently than [adul] in British English.

- The adjective adult, which principally means 'mature' or 'of or for adults': • an adult approach
- adult education, is often used as a euphemism for 'pornographic': • adult videos • an adult film.
- There is a demand for commercial sex from prostitution, through massage parlours and blue movies to strip shows and 'adult' magazines which will not go away... if represented (The Guardian).

**adultescenc** The noun adultescence refers to an adult who continues to enjoy childish pastimes. The word, resulting from the combination of the words adult and adolescence, is a relatively recent coinage and is best restricted to informal contexts. • Many games for PGs are designed to appeal to adultescents as well as to younger players.

See also *kidult*.

- Note the spelling of adultescence, particularly the -sc- in the middle of the word.

**advance** or **advancement**? The noun advance means 'forward motion', or 'progress': • the advance of the enemy. The noun advancement is chiefly used in formal contexts to refer to 'promotion' or 'increased status': • opportunities for personal advancement.

The two nouns are sometimes confused in the context of progress in development: • advances in medical science • the advancement of medical science. Here, advancement refers to the act of assisting progress or development.

**advantage** or **vantage**? Advantage means 'superiority' or 'benefit': • to have the advantage over one's rivals • the advantages of co-education. Vantage is chiefly found in the phrase vantage point, meaning 'a place that affords a good overall view'.

- In tennis, the words vantage and van are sometimes used as shortened forms of the scoring term advantage: • (advantage Smyth).

**advantageous** This word is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent error being the omission of the -ce-. Note also the pronunciation of this word, stressed on the third syllable [advântâjüs].

**adverb** Adverbs modify other parts of speech and answer questions such as how? (adverbs of manner): • quietly • greedily, when? (adverbs of time): • then • tomorrow, where? (adverbs of place): • there • outside.

- They can modify verbs: • She wrote neatly, adjectives: • extremely hot, other adverbs: • fairly well, whole clauses or sentences: • Anyway it doesn't matter now, or can be used to link clauses or sentences: • I dislike him; nevertheless, I feel responsible for him. Adverbs are frequently formed by adding -ly to an adjective: • darkly • wisely, but this does not apply to all adverbs: • to work late • to jump high.

It is usually acceptable to place an adverb between parts of a verb: • I have often spoken about the matter, but adverbs should not come between a verb and its direct object. Whether the adverb is positioned after the object or before the verb depends on the length of the object clause: • They tortured the prisoners cruelly. • They cruelly tortured the political prisoners who had been arrested for demonstrating against the regime.

Careful positioning of the adverb is sometimes necessary in order to avoid ambiguity in a sentence: • She disliked intensely sentimental films, if intensely relates to disliked it should be placed before the verb. See also *adjectives; sentence adverb; split infinitive*.

**adversary** The pronunciation of this word with stress on the second syllable [adversâri] is disliked by many users, who prefer the traditional pronunciation with stress on the first syllable [advârâri].

- See also *stress*.

**adverse** or **averse**? Adverse, meaning 'unfavourable', 'antagonistic', or 'hostile', usually precedes an abstract noun; averse, meaning 'disinclined', 'unwilling', or 'having a strong dislike', usually relates to people and is never placed before the noun it qualifies: • adverse criticism • an adverse effect • Their working conditions are adverse to efficiency. • The committee was not adverse to the proposal. • Her father is not averse to using violence. • They are averse to all publicity.

- The two adjectives are sometimes confused in the sense of 'opposed'. Averse is often preceded by not and may be followed by to or from, to being preferred in modern usage.
Adverse may be stressed on either syllable, but the pronunciation [ədˈvɜːr] is more frequent than [ədˈvɜːrs]. Averse is always stressed on the second syllable [əˈvɜːrs].

advertise This word, meaning 'promote or publicize': • a brochure advertising holidays, is sometimes misspelt. This is one of the words ending in -ise that cannot be spelt -ise; see also -ize or -ise?

advise The use of the verb advise as a synonym for 'tell', 'inform', 'notify', etc., is widely regarded as COMMERCIALISE and is best avoided in general usage: • Please advise us of your new address. • I told [not advised] him that the meeting had been cancelled.

See also COUNSEL or ADVISE?; -ize or -ise?

adviser or advisor? This word, meaning 'person who gives advice', may be spelt either adviser or advisor. Adviser is preferred in British English but advisor is more frequent in American English.

advisory This word, meaning 'for the purpose of giving advice', is sometimes misspelt. Note the -ory ending.

-ae and -oe In such words as archaeology and amoeba, the vowel combinations -ae and -oe were once represented by the characters æ and œ. They are now usually written or printed as separate letters and there is an increasing tendency for the -a- and -o- to be omitted.

- in American English such words as haemorrhage, oestrogen, and anaesthetic are spelt haemorrhage, estrogen, and anaesthetic, although, conversely, aesthetic is not usually preferred to aesthetic. In British English the -o- has already been dropped from ecumenical (formerly ecumenical) and the -a- and -o- are gradually disappearing from meditational, encyclopedia, foetus, etc. This process of simplification, which is particularly associated with scientific and technical contexts, is disliked and resented by some users.

The -ae ending of such plural nouns as vertebral and formulea (see PLURALS) should not be reduced to -e.

See also ARCHAEOLOGY; ENCYCLOPEDIA or ENCYCLOPAEDIA; FOETUS OR FETUS? etc.

aegis This word, meaning 'authority' or 'protection', is sometimes misspelt. Note the ae- at the beginning of the word.

The committee operates under the aegis of the state legislature.

• Aegis is pronounced [eeɪəs].

aerial This word, meaning 'from an aircraft' and 'device that receives or sends out broadcast signals', is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the ae- at the beginning of this word.

aero or air? Both these words may be used adjectively or as prefixes in the sense of 'relating to aeroplanes or aircraft': • aero- ballistic • airliner • aerodrome • airport • an aeroplane • the air force • aerospace • airspace.

• In some American words the prefix aero- is replaced by air-; the nouns aeroplane and aeroflot, for example, are rendered as airplane and airfot in American English.

aeroplane see AERO or AIR; PLANE.

aerosol Note the spelling of this word, particularly the ae- at the beginning and the -ol at the end. An aerosol is a fine spray dispensed from a pressurized container; the noun may refer to the container or the contents.

aesthetic, ascetic or acetic? These three words should not be confused. The adjective aesthetic means 'relating to beauty or good taste': • aesthetic value. An ascetic is a person who practises self-denial; acetic acid is the main component of vinegar.

• Note the spelling of aesthetic, particularly the ae; the variant spelling esthetic is restricted to American English.

Ascetic and acetic are not identical in pronunciation. The middle syllable of ascetic is pronounced with the short [e] sound of set, whereas the middle syllable of acetic is usually pronounced like the word seat.

affect or effect? The noun effect means 'result'; the verb affect means 'influence' or 'have an effect on', hence its frequent confusion with the verb effect, which means 'bring about' or 'accomplish': • The new legislation may have an effect on small businesses. • The new legislation may affect small businesses. • We have affected a number of improvements. Affect and effect are often misused, one in place of the other: • Officials said yesterday the downturn could
affectation

effect the future of the scheme (The Guardian). • 'It will have very little affect,' says... the chief economist at the merchant bank Morgan Grenfell (The Times).

The verb affect is largely restricted to formal contexts. The verb affect is also used in the sense of 'assume', 'pretend', or 'feign'; • I affected an air of indifference. • She affected to despise them. • He affected ignorance.

affectation or affection? Affectation is false behaviour that is intended to impress; affection means 'friendship' or 'tenderness'. The two nouns are related to different meanings of the verb affect and should not be confused.

affinity The use of the preposition for with the noun affinity, in the sense of 'liking' or 'attraction', is disliked by some users but acceptable to most: • He has a natural affinity for lost causes.

• Those who object to this usage restrict the noun to the meaning 'reciprocal relationship or similarity', in which sense it is followed by between or with: • the affinity between the two friends • her affinity with her brother.

afflict or inflict? To affect is to distress or trouble, to inflict is to impose: • He afflicted the prisoners with cruel torture. • He inflicted cruel torture on the prisoners. • Egypt was afflicted with a plague of locusts. • A plague of locusts was inflicted on Egypt.

• The direct object of affect is the sufferer; the direct object of inflict is the suffering. The two verbs should not be confused.

affront or effrontery? Affront may be used as a noun or as a verb, meaning 'insult': • an affront to his pride • I felt affronted. The noun effrontery means 'impudence': • She had the effrontery to suggest we were mistaken.

aficionado This noun, meaning an expert on or devotee of something, is sometimes misspelt. Note the single / and the -c- in the middle of the word.

• The word can be pronounced [afishyaynado] or [aflyaynado]. The original Spanish pronunciation [afityaynado] is best avoided.

African American African American is the term now generally applied to Americans of African descent. It has been preferred to Afro-American since the late 1980s, when the latter term was judged to have derogatory overtones, and is often used in place of BLACK.

• Equivalent coinages recorded in other countries, such as African Canadian, are known but are not yet widely familiar.

African Caribbean African Caribbean is the term generally applied to people of African descent who live in or come from the Caribbean. The alternative Afro-Caribbean is equally acceptable to most people.

Afro-American see AFRICAN AMERICAN.

Afro-Caribbean see AFRICAN CARIBBEAN.

afters see DESSERT, SWEET, PUDDING or AFTERS?

afterward or afterwards? In British English afterwards is the usual form of the adverb meaning 'subsequently', the variant afterward being more frequently used in American English: • I'll do the washing-up afterwards. • His foot was sore for days afterwards.

See also -WARD or -WARDS?

again This word is pronounced either [ægen] or [əgyn]. The first of these is probably the more frequently used.

aged This word is pronounced [æjd] in the sense 'very old': • his aged uncle • looking after the aged. When the word is used with a specific age: • She was aged twenty, it is pronounced [æjd].

aging or aging? This word, meaning '(the process of) becoming old', may be spelt ageing or aging.

ageism Ageism is discrimination against people on the grounds of age, especially in employment, or the offensive use of stereotypical images of old people. In the first sense the noun is not restricted to old age: any job advertisement that puts an upper (or lower) limit on the age of applicants may be described as ageist.

• In the second sense, the noun refers to the assumption that all people over retirement age are dependent, unproductive, intolerant, conservative, infirm, senile, unhappy, poor, etc. Such stereotypes are best avoided wherever possible in speech and writing.

See also POLITICAL CORRECTNESS.

agenda The word agenda is used as a singular noun, with the plural form agen-
das: • The agenda for tomorrow’s meeting has been changed. • This item has appeared on a number of previous agendas.

Originally the plural form of the singular noun agenda, agenda literally means ‘things to be done’. The singular form agenda remains in occasional very formal use in the sense of ‘item on the agenda’.

aggravate The use of the verb aggravate and its derivatives in the sense of ‘annoy’, ‘irritate’, or ‘exasperate’ dates back to the early 17th century but is still disliked by some people. It is therefore best restricted to informal contexts and the offending word replaced by one of its synonyms: • I was aggravated by the noise. • She has a number of aggravating habits. • His lackadaisical attitude is a constant source of aggravation.

The principal meaning of aggravate is ‘make worse’. • Your resignation will aggravate our problem. • The child’s suffering was aggravated by the intense heat.

Note the spelling of aggravate, particularly the -gg- and the single -v-.

aggressive The use of the adjective aggressive in the sense of ‘assertive’ or ‘forceful’ is best avoided where there is a risk of confusion with its principal meaning of ‘belligerent’ or ‘hostile’. • an aggressive salesman • an aggressive approach.

The derived noun aggressiveness may be used for both senses of the adjective but aggression, with its connotations of hostility, should be restricted to the principal meaning: • the aggressiveness of the salesman’s approach • an act of aggression.

Note the spelling of aggressive and aggression, particularly the -gg- and -ss-.

aging see AGING or AGING?

agnostic or atheist? An agnostic is, strictly speaking, a person who holds that knowledge of a Supreme Being, a first cause of everything, etc., is impossible. In general usage, however, the word agnostic is often used in the broader sense of ‘a person who doubts the existence of God’, in contrast to an atheist, ‘a person who denies the existence of God’.

The word agnostic was coined in 1869 by the English biologist Thomas Huxley (1825–95).

ago or since? It is wrong to place ago and since side by side: • It was a fortnight ago that [not since] I posted the letter. • It is a fortnight [not a fortnight ago] since I posted the letter.

Note that ago is preceded by the past tense and since by the present tense in sentences of this type. The first example could be more simply expressed as: • I posted the letter a fortnight ago. The adverbial use of since for this purpose: • I posted the letter a fortnight since, is regarded as very old-fashioned.

The word since is also used as a preposition: • We have lived here since 2001. If a period of time rather than a specific time is mentioned the preposition for should be substituted for since: • We have lived here for three years.

agoraphobia This word, describing a fear of open spaces or public places, is sometimes misspelt. Note the o after the ag-

The word originates from the Greek word agora, ‘marketplace’. Agoraphobia should not be confused with acrophobia, which means ‘fear of heights’.

agreement and person Modern English lacks any formalized system under which the form of a verb changes in order to agree with the subject. Verb endings rarely indicate whether the subject is the person speaking (the first person), the person being addressed (the second person) or someone or something else being spoken about (the third person). This simplified approach makes matching verb endings with their subject relatively straightforward, with the only changes relating to the third person present singular, which requires the addition of a final -s to the verb, and such exceptions as to be, which retains such forms as am (first person singular) and are (second person singular, and first, second, and third person plural): • It remains a question to be resolved. • We are going to town.

The lack of distinctive verb endings in English can lead to confusion in the case of multiple subjects, especially where one of them is in the third person. Thus, both Neither she nor I know where it will lead and Neither she nor I knows where it will lead may be used, although some users will match the verb with the subject closest to it.

See also NEITHER.

People may also disagree over the choice of matching pronoun in the case of nouns that may refer to either gender: • How to keep your child and his phone safe (The Times). • Always let your baby adjust to her new surroundings in her own time. • Let your toddler have its own way now and then.

See also HE or SHE.
-aholic

The suffix -aholic (or -oholic), derived from the noun alcoholic, is being attached to an increasing number of words to denote a person who is obsessed by or addicted to something: • golfaholic • shopaholic • spendaholic • chocoholic.

The noun workaholic, coined in the late 1960s, is now firmly established in the English language, but more recent examples are best avoided in formal contexts.

aid

The noun aid is specifically used to denote a tangible source of help, assistance, or support, such as a device: • hearing aid • teaching aids • audiovisual aids or money, supplies, equipment, etc., given to those in need: • overseas aid.

In the second sense the word was used in a series of fund-raising campaigns inspired by the rock musicians of Band Aid (1984) and the immensely successful rock concert Live Aid (1985): • Live Aid raised millions for the starving in Africa.

The noun aid also occurs in certain fixed expressions, such as legal aid, first aid, and in aid of, but its use as a general synonym for ‘help’, ‘assistance’, or ‘support’ is disliked and avoided by many users.

The spelling of aid should not be confused with that of aide, a noun meaning ‘assistant’; • one of the president’s aids.

Aids

This acronym, for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, was originally written with capital letters when first identified in the early 1980s as a serious disease of the immune system. It is now generally rendered in the form Aids, although both versions are acceptable.

Care should be taken not to confuse Aids with HIV, the abbreviation for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, the infective retrovirus from which the full-blown disease Aids may or may not subsequently develop. • Her son was diagnosed HIV-positive five years ago but has not yet displayed any of the symptoms of full-blown Aids.

ain’t

As a contraction of are not, is not, have not, or has not, ain’t is wrong. It is however generally widely used in speech and in such jocular expressions as: • Things ain’t what they used to be. • You ain’t heard nothing yet.

As a contraction of am not, ain’t is regarded by some users as slightly more acceptable, especially in informal American English in the interrogative form ain’t I, which is replaced in British English by the grammatically irregular aren’t I and in formal contexts by the full form am I not.

air see AERO or AIR

airman or airwoman see NON-SEXIST TERMINS.

air miss or near miss? An air miss is the near collision of two aircraft in the sky. Such a situation is traditionally called a near miss, and both terms are in current use: • The Civil Aviation Authority has launched an investigation into a near miss 33,000 feet over Exmoor (Daily Telegraph). • The Civil Aviation Authority is investigating an air miss over Sussex this morning (BBC South Today).

The expression near miss is also used figuratively to describe something that almost succeeds: • It was a near miss failing by just 1% better luck next time!

aisle

This word is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent mistake being the omission of the silent s. Note also the initial a-.

à la carte

On a menu in a restaurant à la carte refers to a range of individually priced dishes, in contrast to a complete meal charged at a fixed price: • We only have an à la carte menu.

The expression comes from French, and means literally ‘according to the card’.

See also TABLE D’HÔTE.

alcopop

This word, describing a ready-mixed soft drink with an alcoholic content, is best restricted to informal contexts. The formal name for such drinks is FAB (flavoured alcoholic beverage), although this term is largely unknown outside the drinks industry and alcohol pressure groups, etc.

alibi

The use of the noun alibi as a synonym for ‘excuse’ or ‘pretext’ is disliked by many people and is best restricted to informal contexts: • He used the power cut as an alibi for not finishing his essay. • Her illness provided her with an alibi to leave early.

The word alibi, which literally means ‘elsewhere’, is principally used in law to denote a defendant’s plea (or evidence) that he or she was somewhere other than the scene of a crime: • I have an alibi for the afternoon of the robbery—I was at a conference in Birmingham.

align

This word, meaning ‘bring or come into line; support’, is sometimes misspelt. Note the single l and also the silent g.

all

The use of the preposition of between all and the, this, that, these, those, or a possessive
adjective is optional, all being preferred in British English and all of in American English. • All (of) the birds have flown away. • I can't carry all (of) that. • Do all (of) these books belong to you? • All (of) her children are right-handed. • They spent all (of) their leave in France.

 dém All is used alone before nouns that are not preceded by the, these, my, their, etc.; • All birds have wings. • All leave has been cancelled. All of is always used before personal pronouns; • all of us • all of it.

See also all RIGHT or all RIGHT?; all TO-GETHER or altogether?; not.

call The verb allege, meaning 'state without proof', is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent error being the substitution of -edge for the -age ending.

calliteration Alliteration, the use of successive words of that begin with the same or a similar sound, can be employed to striking effect in poetry or newspaper headlines, for instance, but should never be overused. • Round the rugged rock the ragged rascal ran. • Full fathom five thy father lies (Shakespeare, The Taming of the Shrew). • Down in the deep dark dell (The Guardian).

called allowed or aloud? These words are occasionally confused, as they are pronounced in the same way. Allowed is the past participle of the verb allow: • Such behaviour should not be allowed. It should not be confused with aloud, meaning 'audible': • She did not dare to voice her concerns aloud.

all ready see already or all ready?

all right or alright? The spelling all right is correct; the spelling alright is wrong.

 dém Some users defend the spelling alright, arguing that altogether and already are analogous spellings. Such users want to distinguish alright, satisfactory or acceptable: • The play was alright for children from alright. • The answers were alright, i.e. all the answers were right.

all together see altogether or all together?

allude The verb allude means 'refer indirectly'; it should not be used in place of the verb refer itself: • He was alluding to the death of his father when he spoke of the loss of a lifelong friend. • She referred [not alluded] to 'the spectre of redundancy' in her speech on unemployment.

 dém Allude should not be confused with elude (see AVOID, EVADE or ELUDE).

See also allusion, illusion or delusion?; allusive, elusive or illusive?

allure or lure? Both these words may be used as a noun or as a verb. The verbs allure and lure are virtually synonymous in the sense of 'enticing', 'tempt', or 'attract', but lure is by far the more frequent: • They tried to lure her away. The verb allure is most frequently found in the form of the present participle, used as an adjective: • an alluring proposition.

 dém The nouns allure and lure share the meaning 'attraction', but they are used in different contexts. Lure refers to the act of attracting, whereas allure refers to the attractiveness of the person or thing concerned: • the lure of the golden ring • the allure of show business.

allusion, illusion or delusion? An allusion is an indirect reference (see allude); an illusion is a false or misleading impression or perception; a delusion is a false or mistaken idea or belief: • an allusion to his schooldays at Eton • an optical illusion • to destroy one's illusions • delusions of grandeur • to labour under a delusion.

 dém The nouns allusion and illusion are confused because of their similarity in pronunciation, illusion and delusion because of their similarity in meaning.

 dém Illusion and delusion are virtually interchangeable in some contexts but careful users maintain the distinction between them where necessary. An illusion is often pleasant and harmless; a delusion may be a sign of mental disorder: • the illusions of childhood • the delusion that she is Queen Elizabeth I. An illusion temporarily deceives the senses and is sometimes known to be false; a delusion is a strongly held opinion that is not easily eradicated.

See also allusive, elusive or illusive?

allusive, elusive or illusive? The adjectives allusive and elusive relate to the nouns allusion and illusion respectively (see allu- sion, illusion or delusion?); elusive means 'difficult to catch, find, achieve, describe, define, remember, etc.': • an allusive style • an elusive hope • an elusive quality.

 dém Elusive and elusive are identical in pronunciation (loosiv); allusive differs only in the pronunciation of the first syllable (aloosiv).

 dém Of the three adjectives elusive is the most frequent, allusive is rarely used and elusive is usually replaced by its synonym illusive.
alma mater The Latin phrase alma mater is a formal expression used to refer to one's school, college, or university.

Almond This word is sometimes mispronounced. The -d is silent, as in calm; the correct pronunciation is [aindrical].

alone or lone? Alone and lone are both used in the sense of 'solitary' or 'by oneself', but alone is always placed after the verb and lone before the noun: • She was alone. • a lone cyclist. • The house stood alone. • a lone tree. Lone tends to be used more in literary or poetic contexts. There is also some difference in meaning: alone is more likely to suggest loneliness or a desire for solitude, whereas lone usually describes a person or thing that simply happens to be on his/her/its own.

along with In the phrase along with, the word along is often superfluous: • The package was delivered along with the rest of the mail could be changed to: • The package was delivered with the rest of the mail without affecting the meaning.

aloud see allowed or aloud?

already or all ready? The adverb already should not be confused with the phrase all ready, as both have distinct meanings. Already variously means 'at a time earlier than expected' or 'by or before a particular time', whereas all ready means 'in a state of complete readiness': • Have you finished your homework already? • They are already in the building. • Is everything all ready?

alright see all right or alright?

also The use of the adverb also in place of the conjunction and is disliked and avoided by many users, especially in formal writing:
• Please send me a copy of your new catalogue and a list of local stockists [not . . . a copy of your new catalogue, also a list . . .].

The combination and also, however, is generally acceptable: • Please send me a copy of your new catalogue and also a list of local stockists.

In some sentences also must be carefully positioned in order to convey the intended meaning: • She also (as well as someone else) was carrying an umbrella. • She was carrying an umbrella also (as well as something else). • She was wearing a raincoat and she was also carrying an umbrella.

See also NOT ONLY . . . BUT ALSO.

altar or alter? These words are sometimes confused. An altar is a place where sacrifices are offered to a god and also the table on which the bread and wine are blessed in Communion services: • The priest approached the altar. Alter with an e means 'change': • a scheme for radically altering the whole tax system.

The different words both have the same pronunciation [awlt].

alternate or alternative? The adjective alternate means 'every other' or 'occurring by turns'; the adjective alternative means 'offering a choice' or 'being an alternative': • on alternate Saturdays • alternate layers • alternative routes • an alternative suggestion.

The use of alternate in place of alternative is acknowledged by most dictionaries but disliked by many users. Alternative should not be used in place of alternate.

Note the difference in pronunciation between the adjective alternate [awl'teinit] and the verb alternate [awl'temay].

The adjective alternative is used with increasing frequency in the specific sense of 'not conventional' or 'not traditional': • alternative medicine • alternative comedy • alternative technology • alternative energy. This usage is best avoided where there is a risk of ambiguity: • I decided to buy an alternative newspaper.

The noun alternative traditionally denotes either of two possibilities, or the opportunity of choosing between them, but is widely used with reference to three or more options or choices: • Are the current alternatives to the dole effective? (Daily Telegraph). • If the campaign against terrorism is not successful within a few months the only alternatives will be surrender, negotiation, or a long drawn-out war of attrition. Criticism of this usage on etymological grounds (alternative is derived
from the Latin word alter, meaning 'other (of two)' is dismissed by most authorities as pedantry.

alternative medicine see COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE or ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE?

although or however? The conjunction although should not be treated as interchangeable with the adverb however, which is used to introduce contrasting information.

• The team should do well although they have been hit by injuries; their opponents, however, are unlikely to make much impression.
• Note that however is usually followed by a comma, but although is not.

although or though? As conjunctions, meaning 'despite the fact that', although and though are interchangeable in most contexts: • We bought the table, although/though it was damaged.

• Though is slightly less formal but more versatile than although: it may be used in combination with even for extra emphasis; in the phrase as though (see AS IF or AS THOUGHT?); after an adjective; and as an informal substitute for the adverb however.

• We bought the table, even though it was damaged. • We bought the table, damaged though it was.

• Ground coffee tastes better than instant coffee; it's more expensive, though. Although is not used in any of these contexts.

• Though and (less frequently) although are also used in the sense of 'but' or 'and yet': • They applauded, though not enthusiastically. • It's possible, though unlikely.

• The shortened forms altha', altha, tho', and tha' are best avoided in formal writing.

Sec also if.

altogether or all together? The adverb altogether means 'in all' or 'completely'; all together means 'at the same time' or 'in the same place': • She has nine pets altogether. • Your system is altogether different from ours. • They disappeared altogether. • They arrived all together. • We keep our reference books all together on a separate shelf.

aluminium Note the spelling of this word, which is the accepted spelling in English; in American English, the spelling is alumin-um.

• In British English, the stress falls on the third syllable; in American English on the second syllable.

• Aluminium was the name given in 1812 by its discoverer, the English chemist Sir Humphry Davy (1778–1829), although he had originally proposed aluminium. By analogy with the names of such other elements as potassium and sodium, the name aluminium was also suggested and is now the standard form in British English.

alumnus The word alumnus, meaning 'former pupil or student', is reserved for males but note that the plural form alumni may refer to former students of both sexes. The equivalent for a female student is alumna [plural alumnae].

a.m. and p.m. Full stops are often retained in the abbreviations a.m. (for ante meridiem, meaning 'before noon') and p.m. (for post meridiem, meaning 'after noon') to distinguish a.m. from the verb am.

• The use of capital letters is acceptable but rare.

See also ABBREVIATIONS.

• The abbreviation a.m. refers to the hours from midnight to midday; p.m. refers to the hours from midday to midnight: • 12 a.m. is five minutes after midnight; • 12.05 p.m. is five minutes after midday. Such phrases as 8.15 a.m. in the morning and 11.45 p.m. at night are tautological; either a.m. or in the morning and either p.m. or at night should be omitted.

amanuensis This word, meaning 'person employed to take dictation or copy manuscripts', is sometimes misspelt. Note the single n and the -ses in the middle of the word.

• Amanuensis, pronounced [ˌəmənəˈɛnsɪs], is best restricted to formal contexts. The plural form is amanuenses, pronounced [ˌəmənəˈɛnsɪz].

amateur This word, meaning 'person who follows an activity as a pastime rather than as a profession': • an amateur golfer, has several pronunciations, the most frequent being [əˈmeɪtər]. The pronunciations [əˈmeɪtər], [əˈmeɪtwər], and [əˈmeɪtər] are also heard.

ambiience Some people object to the frequent use of the noun ambience as a pretentious synonym for 'atmosphere': • the ambience of the restaurant.

• The French spelling ambiance and an anglicized form of the French pronunciation are sometimes used in English. The English pronunciation of ambience is [ˈambiəns].

ambiguous or ambivalent? Ambiguous means having two or more possible interpretations or meanings' or 'obscure';
ambivalent means 'having conflicting emotions or attitudes' or 'indecisive': • The phrase 'a French horn player' is ambiguous. • Many people are ambivalent about the issue of disarmament: they recognize the importance of the nuclear deterrent but feel that the money spent on nuclear weapons could be put to better use.

- Careful users maintain the distinction between the two adjectives, avoiding the temptation to use ambivalent in place of ambiguous. In some contexts, including the above example, be ambivalent may be better replaced by have mixed feelings or be in two minds.

*ameba*  
see *amoeba* or *ameba* 2

*amen*  
The word *amen*, meaning 'so be it', may be pronounced [əˈmen] or [əˈmɛn]. Both pronunciations are correct.

*amend* or *emend* 2  
Of these two verbs *amend*, meaning 'correct', 'improve', or 'alter', is the more general, *emend* being restricted to the correction of errors in a printed or written text: • The ambiguous wording of the opening paragraph has been amended.  • They have amended the rules.  • The manuscript was emended by an eminent scholar.

- The pronunciation of *amend* ([əˈmɛnd]) is very similar to that of *emend* ([əˈmɛnd]). Their derived nouns, however, are quite different: • an amendment  • an emendation.

*amenity*  
The noun *amenity* is ultimately derived from the Latin word for 'pleasant'. A few users prefer to restrict the term, which is generally used in the plural form *amenities*, to what is conducive to comfort or pleasure, objecting to its extended application to what is merely useful or convenient: • The amenities of the hotel include a sauna, swimming pool, licensed restaurant, and 24-hour room service.  • The town lacks some of the basic amenities, such as public toilets and a rubbish dump.

- *Amenity* is usually pronounced [əˈmɛnɪtɪ], with a long e, but the pronunciation [əˈmɛntɪ], with a short e, is an accepted variant and is usual in American English.

*America*  
The word *America* is most frequently used with reference to the United States of America, although it strictly denotes the whole landmass comprising Canada, the USA, Central America, and South America.

- The United States of America may be shortened to the United States, the USA, the US, or (in informal contexts) the States: • I often go to the States on business. USA and US are sometimes written or printed with full stops (see also *abbreviations*).

Like America, the adjective *American* is largely restricted in general usage to the meaning of 'of the USA'. The abbreviation *US* may be used adjectively to avoid ambiguity: • a US actor. There is no single noun that specifically denotes a native or citizen of the USA, but *American* is generally used for this purpose: • The book was written by an American.

*American Indian*  
see *Native American.*

*Americanisms*  
For many years American English has had a significant influence on British English. Although many British purists dislike *American English*, in some respects its differences arise from greater conservatism than British English. Such words as: • gotten  • fall (autumn), as well as many American spellings, were originally the British forms and have changed in Britain but not in the United States. American English is also a fertile ground for new words and idioms and there is no reason why British English should not borrow the more striking ones. Such American words as: • truck  • commuter  • teenager have become part of British vocabulary. Other words of American origin that have been widely transmitted elsewhere reflect the country's particular cultural influences, such as that exerted by Native American culture: • moccasin  • squaw  • prairie.

- The most noticeable differences between American and British English are those of vocabulary. Most British people are familiar with the better-known American equivalents: • sidewalk (pavement)  • elevator (lift)  • cookie (biscuit)  • vacation (holiday)  • chips (crisps)  • fries (chips)  • hood (bonnet). It is when the same word or phrase is used with different meanings that confusion arises. If an American says: • I put on my vest and pants and washed up, an English person might think of him washing the dishes in his underwear, while in fact he had put on his waistcoat and trousers and washed his hands.

There are various differences between British and American spellings: • tyre  • tire  • mould  • mold  • connection  • connexion. Many words ending in -re in British English have the ending -er in American English: • centre  • theater
amount

- theater • fibre - fiber; many words ending in -our in British English have the ending -or in American English: • colour - color • humour - humor. British English has in most cases resisted American spellings, such as traveler (for traveller) and analyze (for analyse), although the American tendency to drop the o or a in words like foetus or encyclopaedia is growing increasingly familiar in British spelling.

See also -AE and -OE: SPELLING 1.

The significant differences in grammar include a few past tenses like the American dive (dived) or gotten and the American tendency to say: • Do you have . . . ? where the British would say: • Have you . . . ? or: • Have you got . . . ? Speakers of British English generally tend to use less direct forms of approach than Americans, preferring such forms as: • Would you mind if . . . ? or: • I'm afraid that . . . . and may find more direct American approaches lacking in politeness. Americans in turn may consider such Britons forced and overly formal.

See also QUOTATION MARKS: SHALL OR WILL?;
SUBJUNCTIVE TENSE.

Differences in pronunciation between British and American English can lead to confusion even over identical words, as for instance in the cases of missile (pronounced [misli] in British English but [misli] in American English) and laboratory (pronounced [laboratéry] in British English but [laboráry] in American English).

Much as many British people deplore the adoption of such American words and phrases as: • lay-out • no way • cookbook (instead of cookery book), and • truck (instead of lorry), it can be assumed that such words will continue to cross the Atlantic and that they will continue to be absorbed into British English.

amiable or amicable? Amiable means 'friendly', 'pleasant', 'agreeable', or 'congenial'; amicable means 'characterized by friendliness or goodwill': • an amiable man • an amicable agreement • She smiled at me in an amiable manner. • The dispute was settled in an amicable manner.

The two adjectives should not be confused.

amid, amidst, mid or midst? Amid and amidst are synonymous, and are used in formal or poetic contexts, but amidst is used more rarely. Both mean 'in the middle of' or 'among': • amid the crowd • amidst the waving reeds. The word mid also means 'in the middle of'; in modern usage it is chiefly found in combination with nouns: • mid-September • mid-air. Midst is most frequently used as a noun, in the phrases in the midst of; meaning 'in the middle of' and in or their/its etc. midst, meaning 'among us/them/etc': • in the midst of the election campaign • There is a traitor in our midst.

amoeba or ameba? There are two possible spellings for this word, which refers to a very small single-cell organism. The first is more frequent in British English, but both forms are used in American English.

See also -AE and -OE.

amok or amuck? The word amok, pronounced [āmōk] or [āmok] and used especially in the phrase run amok, 'behave in a violent manner; go berserk', has the rarer variant spelling amuck, pronounced [āmūk].

The word derives from Malay amaq, 'frenzied attack'.

among or amongst? The words among and amongst are interchangeable in all contexts, among being the more frequent in modern usage: • They hid among/ amongst the bushes.

Some users prefer among before a consonant sound and amongst before a vowel sound: • among strangers • amongst ourselves.

See also BETWEEN or AMONG?

amoral or immoral? Amoral means 'not concerned with morality' or 'having no moral standards'; immoral means 'not conforming to morality' or 'infringing accepted moral standards': • an amoral matter • an amoral politician • immoral behaviour • an immoral young man. Some people consider sissiection to be immoral, others have an amoral attitude to the issue.

Careful users maintain the distinction between the two adjectives, both of which can be used in a derogatory manner.

The first syllable of amoral may be pronounced as a long a [āmōrəl] or a short a [āmərəl]. Immoral is pronounced [imərəl]. Note the spellings of the two words, particularly the single m of amoral and the -mm- of immoral.

amount or number? The words amount and number are not synonymous. Number refers to a countable quantity and is preferred to amount in reference to plural nouns, while amount refers to something uncountable: • a large number of volunteers • any amount of rubbish.

Note that while it is correct to talk about a large
amuck

or small number or amount, some people consider it less correct to talk about a big or little number or amount.

amuck see AMOK or AMUCK?

an see A or AN?

anaemia or anemia? There are two possible spellings for this word, which refers to a medical condition resulting from a deficiency in red blood cells in the blood. Anaemia is the accepted spelling in British English, while anemia is the usual form in American English.

anaesthetic This word, meaning 'a substance that produces a loss of feeling', is sometimes misspelt. Note the -ae- in the middle of the word.

See also -AE and -OE.

analogous The adjective analogous is best avoided where similar, equivalent, comparable, corresponding, like, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • The new system is analogous to that used in the electronics industry.

The usual pronunciation of analogous is [anál-ó-gús], with the hard g of goat and analogue, not the soft g of gem and analogy.

analyse The s of analyse should not be replaced with a in British English, analyse being the American spelling of the word.

See also -IE or -IS?

Some people object to the use of the verb analyse in place of discuss, examine, etc.: • Your proposal will be analysed at the next committee meeting. The frequent use of the noun analysis in general contexts is also disliked, especially the phrases in the last analysis, in the final analysis, and in the ultimate analysis, which can usually be replaced by in the end, at last, finally, ultimately, etc.

analysis see ANALYSE.

ancillary This word, meaning 'supplementary or subsidiary': • ancillary services, is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the c, the -il-, and the ending -ary, not -airy.

and The use of and at the beginning of a sentence is disliked by some users but acceptable to most. And it can sometimes be an effective way of drawing attention to what follows.

Two or more subjects joined with and are used with a plural verb unless they represent a single concept.

See also SINGULAR or PLURAL?

For the use of a comma before and in a series of three or more items see COMMA 1. And may also be preceded by a comma in other contexts, especially in complex sentences or where there is a risk of ambiguity: • Jenny owns the red car, and the black car belongs to her brother. • He unlocked the door with the key that he had found inside the stolen purse, and went in. • She has been to Spain, Portugal, and Italy, and hopes to visit Greece next year. The omission of the first and in the last example and similar sentences is a frequent error.

The use of and in place of to is best avoided in formal contexts: • We'd better try and find it. • I'll come and see you tomorrow.

See also AND/OR or ME?

and/or The phrase and/or should only be used where three possibilities are envisaged: • cash and/or postage stamps, for example, means 'cash, postage stamps, or both'.

The phrase should not be used where and or or would be adequate: • This food is suitable for hamsters and [not and/or] gerbils. • The bank is not open on Saturdays or [not and/or] Sundays.

And/or is best restricted to official, legal, or commercial contexts and replaced elsewhere by a slightly longer phrase: • The casserole may be served with potatoes or carrots or both [not potatoes and/or carrots].

anemia see ANAEMIA or ANEMIA?

anesthetic see ANAESTHETIC.

angle Some people object to the frequent use of the noun angle in place of point of view, standpoint, etc.: • The report has been written from a unilateralist angle.

The verb angle implies a lack of objectivity: • The play was angled to make the audience sympathize with the criminal.

angry The adjective angry is followed by the preposition about or at in the sense 'angry about something': • She was angry about [or at] the way they had treated him, and with in the sense of 'angry with a person': • Are you angry with me?

ANIMALS — see table, page 19
## ANIMALS
For collective nouns used with animals, see COLLECTIVE NOUNS.

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<tr>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Male</th>
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annex or annexed? In British English, annex is a verb meaning 'add' or 'appropriate'; annexed is a noun that denotes a building built or used as an extension: • to annex a state • a room in the annex.
• The variant spelling of the noun without the final -e is largely restricted to American English. It is wrong to spell the verb with a final -e: • He had no ambitions to annex the Department of Transport (The Guardian).

annual, biennial or perennial? An annual plant, e.g. the marigold, completes its life cycle in only one growing season. A biennial plant, e.g. the strawberry, germinates and accumulates food reserves in the first year and flowers, fruits, and dies during the second year. A perennial plant, e.g. a woody tree and a herbaceous plant such as the foxglove, grows for more than two years, sometimes lasting for several years and usually having a new growth of flowers each year.
• Note the -no- spelling in these words.

anonymous This word, meaning 'of unknown origin or identity': • an anonymous donor, is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent error being to replace the y with an i.

anorak The word anorak, referring originally to a thick, waterproof hooded coat, has been used since the early 1980s as a derogatory term for a person who is obsessively interested in something generally considered unfashionable or boring. In this sense, the word is best restricted to informal contexts. • He's one of those anoraks who hang around railway stations recording train numbers.
• The word also has the derived adjective anoraky or anorakish.

anorexic or anorectic? The words anorexic and anorectic are interchangeable. Either may be used as a noun or as an adjective to describe a person suffering from the disorder anorexia nervosa, although anorexic is used more frequently.

-ant or -ent? The suffixes -ant or -ent, identical in pronunciation, cause frequent spelling problems. Either suffix may be used for nouns and adjectives: • the defendant • a superintendant • a defiant child • an irreverent remark. However, in many cases where both -ant and -ent forms exist, -ant is the usual form for the noun and -ent for the adjective (see CONFIDENT or CONFIDANT?; DEPENDANT or DEPENDENT?; PENDANT or PENDENT?).
• It may be useful to remember that nouns and adjectives formed from verbs ending in -ate take the suffix -ant rather than -ent: • predominant • stimulant • tolerant • mutant.

ante- or anti-? These two prefixes are sometimes confused. Ante-, from Latin, means 'before': • antemural • anteroom • antecedent. Anti-, from Greek, means 'against; opposite to': • anti-apartheid • anti-aircraft • anti-American • anticlockwise.
• In British English, both prefixes are pronounced [anti]; in American English anti- is pronounced [ant] or [anti], ante- [anti].

antecedent An antecedent is a word, phrase, or clause to which a subsequent word refers: • She passed the book to him and he took it (in which the book is the antecedent). Care should be taken to avoid confusion over the antecedent being referred to: • She passed the book through the window and he opened it (where the antecedent could be either the book or the window).

antennae or antennas? The noun antenna has two plural forms, antennae and antennas. The plural form antennae, pronounced to rhyme with my or tree, is used to denote an insect's or crustacean's feelers; when antenna is used to mean 'aerial' (this sense being of American origin) the plural form antennas is preferred.

anti- see ANTE- or ANTI-?

anticipate The verb anticipate is widely used as a synonym for 'expect': • We do not anticipate that there will be any problems. • Oil prices showed their expected leap yesterday. . . . But the rally was not as strong as some traders anticipated (Daily Telegraph). This usage is disliked by many people, who restrict the verb to its accepted more formal senses of 'forestall', 'act in advance of', etc: • Preventative medicine anticipates disease. • They anticipated the attack by boarding up their doors and windows. • You must learn to anticipate his needs.
The verb is best avoided altogether where there is a risk of ambiguity, as in such sentences as I anticipated her resignation and The driver anticipated the accident.

**antidote** The noun *antidote* is followed by the preposition to or for: • Alcohol should not be used as an antidote to [or for] depression.

**antihistamine** The word *antihistamine*, which denotes a medicinal substance that is used to treat allergies, is sometimes misspelt. Note the third syllable, *hist-* (not *hyst-*), and the -ine ending.

**antique** or **antiquated?** The adjective *antique* is used to describe a piece of furniture or a work of art that is old and valuable: • a beautiful antique vase. The adjective *antiquated*, meaning ‘old-fashioned’ or ‘obsolete’, is usually derogatory: • an antiquated washing machine • antiquated procedures.

**antisocial, asocial, unsocial** or **unsociable?** These four adjectives are sometimes confused. Both *antisocial* and *unsocial* can mean ‘unfriendly’, describing somebody who avoids the company of others: • Our new neighbours seem rather antisocial/ unsocial. *Antisocial* is the stronger of the two and may also describe behaviour that causes harm or inconvenience to others: • an antisocial act/habit. *Asocial*, a much rarer word, implies a deeper hostility to or withdrawal from society; *unsocial* is chiefly used in the phrase *unsocial hours*, referring to the time when most people are not at work: • You must be prepared to work unsocial hours.

See also **social?**

**antonym** An *antonym* is a word that has the opposite meaning to another word: • right (the antonym of wrong) • quick (the antonym of slow). It yields the adjective *antonymous*, but this is less familiar in daily use than *synonymous*, which signifies two words with the same meaning, and is best avoided in informal contexts.

**any** The use of a singular or plural verb with the pronoun *any* depends on the sense and context in which it is used: • Is any of the furniture damaged? • Ask him if any of his children watch/witches the programme.

* In the first example *any*, like *furniture*, must be used with a singular verb. In example of the second type a singular verb is preferred if *any* is used in the sense of ‘any one’ and a plural verb if *any* implies ‘some’.

See also **SINGULAR or PLURAL?**

The use of *any* in place of *at all* is used in American English but should be avoided in British English: • Her manners haven’t improved *any*.

See also **ANYBODY or ANYONE?**

**anybody** or **anyone?** The pronoun *anybody* and its synonym *anyone* are interchangeable in all contexts.

* Both are used with a singular verb but are sometimes followed by a plural personal pronoun or possessive adjective (see **THEY**): • Has anybody/*anyone* finished their work?

Note the difference between the one-word compound *anyone* and the more specific two-word form *any one*, both of which may be applied to people: • *Anyone* could have started the fire. • Any one of the tenants could have started the fire.

Only the two-word compound is used of things: • These tables are not reserved, so you can sit at any one you like.

**anymore** or **any more?** This word, variously meaning ‘any longer’ or ‘nowadays’, is generally rendered *any more* in British English and careful users avoid *anymore*, the accepted form in American English: • She does not live there anymore.

**anyplace** or **any place?** This word is usually rendered *any place* in British English and careful users avoid *anyplace*, the accepted form in American English: • Have you seen my jacket *any place*? British English in any case tends to prefer *anywhere*.

**anytime** or **any time?** This word is usually rendered *any time* in British English and careful users avoid *anytime*, the accepted form in American English: • Come round *any time*.

**apartheid** The name of the former South African political system *apartheid* may be pronounced in several different ways. Some users prefer the pronunciation [əˈpɑːrθaɪt] following the Afrikaans original. Other frequently used pronunciations are [əˈpɑːrθiːt] and pronunciations in which the h is not sounded: [əˈpɑːrɪt] and [əˈpɑːrt].

**apothegm** This word, meaning ‘aphorism’, is sometimes misspelt. Note the -ph- in the middle of the word and the -egm ending. It is sometimes rendered *apothegm*.
apostasy

in American English: • This truth is expressed in a pungent apothegm.
• The word is pronounced [apəˈθɛɡm].

apostasy This word, meaning 'renunciation of a religious or political belief, cause, or allegiance', is sometimes misspelt. Note the -ay ending.

apostrophe The apostrophe is used mainly to denote possession and other relationships: • Angela's house • the Church of England's doctrines • the rabbits' Warren, and to indicate omitted letters in contractions: • can't • you're • there's.
• Difficulties with the possessive use of the apostrophe centre on its presence or absence and its position before or after the s (for the basic rules see 's or 's?). Advertisers are particularly guilty of sins of omission: • mens clothes • last years prices • special children's menu, and market stalls are particularly prone to forming plurals with apostrophes: • potato's • apricot's. Other examples recorded in recent years have included: • cres's • gateaux's • Beware of the dog's. Units of measure often have their apostrophes omitted; it should be: • 50 years' service • a six months' stay in America. With well-known commercial organizations and products the tendency is now to drop the apostrophe: • Barclays Bank • Macmillans • Peers soap.

Possessive personal pronouns do not take apostrophes: • his book • its name • it is ours, but indefinite pronouns do: • anybody's guess • no one's fault. Purists have maintained that as else is not a noun or pronoun it cannot take an apostrophe, and have used the form: • someone's else, but someone else's is now generally acceptable.

There are a few exceptions to the rule that apostrophes cannot be used for plurals. They can be used to indicate the plurals of individual letters, words, and numbers in expressions like: • It takes two 1's in the past tense. • She often begins sentences with and's and but's. • He writes his 7's in the continental way. The apostrophe is also sometimes used for the plural of some abbreviations: • MPs, but this usage is becoming less frequent.

Apart from the use of the apostrophe to indicate contractions such as shouldn't, I'm, 'n (for and: • salt 'n' vinegar flavour crisps), it is used to indicate missing letters in poetic forms such as e'er, o'er, in terms such as o'clock, will-o'-the-wisp, and in names like O'Connor. It might also be used when writing dialogue to indicate Cockney or dialect speech: • 'E was goin' to 'Ackney. • . . . 'Tis said 'a was a poor parish 'prentice (Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge). Apostrophes are also sometimes used to indicate missing numbers: • the generation who were young in the '60s.

Apostrophes are no longer generally used for shortened forms that are in general use: • flu • phone • photo • plane.

See also CONTRACTIONS; DATES; -ING forms; ITS or IT'S.; POSSESSIVES.

appal Note the spelling of this verb, especially the -pp- and (in British English) the single l.
• The usual American English spelling of the word is appall. In British English the final -l is doubled before a suffix beginning with a vowel, as in appalled and appalling (see also SPELLING 1).

apparatus This word is usually pronounced [əˈpærətəs] or [əˈpærətəs], though the pronunciation [əˈpærətəs] is also sometimes heard.

appendixes or appendices? The noun appendix has two accepted plural forms, appendices and appendices.
• The use of the plural form appendixes is largely restricted to the anatomical sense of the word: • During his early years as a surgeon he removed countless tonsils, adenoids, and appendixes.

in the sense of 'supplement (to a book, document, etc.)' the plural form appendixes, pronounced [əˈpɛndɪks], is preferred by most users: • One of the appendixes lists foreign words and phrases in general usage.

applicable In the more traditional pronunciation of this word, the first syllable is stressed [əˈplɪkəbli]. The pronunciation with the second syllable stressed [əˈplɪkaɪbli] is probably more frequently heard, however.

See also STRESS.

apposition A noun or phrase that is in apposition supplies further information about another noun or phrase. Both nouns or phrases refer to the same person or thing; they are equivalent in meaning. In the sentence • Mary Jones, an accountant, was elected, the phrases Mary Jones: and an accountant are in apposition. In the phrase • the accusation that he had stolen the car, the accusation and that he had stolen the car are in apposition.
• Like relative clauses (see CLAUSE), appositive nouns or phrases may be defining or non-defining. The phrase • that he had stolen the car is non-defining in • The accusation, that he had stolen the
appropriate The adjective appropriate is followed by the preposition to or for: • language that is appropriate to [or for] the situation in which it is used.

approval The noun approval is followed by the preposition of or for: • They expressed their approval of [or for] our plan.

a priori The Latin phrase a priori, which literally means 'from the previous', is applied adjectively to deductive or presumptive reasoning, arguments, statements, etc.

apropos As a preposition meaning 'with regard to', apropos may be followed by of: • apropos of your enquiry • apropos of the new development.

apt see MABLE or LIKELY?

aqueduct The noun aqueduct, describing a structure that carries water, is often misspelt. Note that the word begins a-.-, not aqua- (as in aqualung, aquaplane, etc).

Arab, Arabian or Arabic? The adjective Arab relates to the people of Arabia and their descendants, Arabian to Arabia itself, and Arabic to the language of Arabia and other Arab countries: • an Arab sheikh • the Arab nations • the Arabian peninsula • the Arabian Sea • an Arabic numeral • Arabic literature.

apt in formal contexts apropos is also used as an adjective, meaning 'appropriate', and as an adverb, meaning 'incidentally': • Your remark was not quite apropos. • Apropos the contract, is it concluded?

Apropos is always written as one word in English, unlike the French phrase à propos, from which it is derived. Note that the initial a is followed by a single p.

The pronunciation of this word is [apropos]; the s is not sounded.

arbiter or arbitrator? An arbiter is a person who has the power to judge or
arbitrarily

who has absolute control; an arbitrator is a person who is appointed to settle a dispute:
* an arbiter of fashion * an arbiter of human destiny  • The arbitrator's decision proved acceptable to both parties.

• The general term arbitrator may be employed in place of the more specific arbitrator, but the two nouns are not fully interchangeable.

arbitrarily The adverb *arbitrarily* should be stressed on the first syllable [árbritráli].
• The pronunciation [árbritráli], in which the primary stress shifts to the third syllable, although unacceptable to many people, is the most frequently used.

arbitrator  see ARBITER or ARBITRATOR?

arch- and archi- The prefixes arch- and archi- are both derived from a Greek word meaning 'to rule'. In words beginning with the prefix arch- the -ch- sound is soft, as in choose; in words beginning with the prefix archi- the -ch- sound is hard, as in chord: • archbishop [archbishop] • architect [architect].
• The word archangel [arkaynədʒl] is an exception to this rule, in the suffixes arch and archy the -ch- sound is always hard: • patriarch [paytrian] • anarchy [anárki].

archaeology  This word, describing the study of the materials of ancient cultures, is spelt with the vowels -ae- in the middle of the word in both British and American English.
• The alternative spelling archeology is occasionally encountered in American English.

See also -AE- and -OE-.

archetypal  The adjective archetypal is best avoided where typical, characteristic, classic, original, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • an archetypal Yorkshire village.

arch- see ARCH- and ARCHI-

aren't The use of this informal contracted form of are not is widely avoided in formal contexts.
• Note that in questions aren't may also be used in informal contexts as a contraction of am not: • I'm next, aren't I? • Aren't I clever?

Argentine or Argentinian? Either word may be used as an adjective, meaning 'of Argentina', or as a noun, denoting a native or inhabitant of Argentina. Though purists prefer Argentine, Argentinian is more frequent in both senses: • the Argentinian/Argentine flag • an Argentinian/Argentine ship.
• Her stepfather is an Argentinian/Argentine.
• The word Argentine may be pronounced [arjén tin] or [arjé tin], rhyming with nine or more.

The republic of Argentina is sometimes called the Argentine: • They lived in the Argentine for several years.

argument  Note the spelling of this word.
The final -e of the verb argue is dropped when the suffix -ment is added to form the noun.

arise or rise? Arise means 'come into being', 'originate', or 'result'; rise means 'get up', 'move upwards', or 'increase': • A problem has arisen.  • The quarrel arose from a misunderstanding.  • He rose to greet her.

The verb arise is followed by the preposition from or out of: • issues arising from or out of the discussion.

See also RAISE or RISE?

aristocrat  In British English this word is usually stressed on the first syllable [ar-is-tòkrat].
• Some speakers stress the second syllable [ar-is-tòkrat], but this is disliked by many people, although standard in American and Scottish English.

around or about? In British English about is preferred to around in the sense of 'approximately': • We have about/around 200 employees.  • He left at about/around eleven o'clock.
• Many people regard the use of around in this sense as an Americanism.

In the sense of 'here and there' around and about are interchangeable in most contexts: • to run around/about • sitting around/about all day • toys scattered around/about the room. In the sense of 'surrounding' about is less frequent than around (in American English) and round (in British English). In the sense 'concerning', both British and American English use around: • He has issues around his childhood. • A lot of people have expressed worries about the threat of biological terrorism.

See also AROUND or ROUND?

around or round? Around and round are synonymous in most of their adverbial and
prepositional senses, around being preferred in American English and round in British English: • I turned round around. • The wheels went round around. • They sat round around the table. • She wore a gold chain round around her ankle.

See also AROUND OR ABOUT?

arouse or rouse? Arouse means 'stimulate' or 'excite'; rouse means 'wake' or 'stir': • Their curiosity was aroused. • The ban on smoking has aroused widespread opposition. • The noise of the aeroplane roused the child. • I was roused to anger by his accusations.

The direct object of arouse is usually an abstract noun; the direct object of rouse is usually a person or animal. The substitution of arouse for rouse in the sense of 'wake' is acceptable but rare.

arpeggio This word, meaning 'the notes of a chord played in succession', is sometimes misspelt. Note the -gg in the middle of the word.

arpeggio is pronounced [arpejjo].

artefact or artifact? Both spellings of this noun, referring to an object made by a person, e.g. a tool with special historical interest, are correct. Artifact is probably more frequent in British English and artefact in American English.

articles see a or an?; the.

artifact see ARETEFACT OR ARTIFACT?

artist or artiste? An artist is a person who is skilled in one or more of the fine arts, such as painting or sculpture; an artiste is a professional entertainer, such as a singer or dancer; • the Dutch artist Vincent Van Gogh; • the music-hall artiste Marie Lloyd.

The extended sense of 'skilled person' the noun artist may be substituted for artiste, which is becoming less frequent. Both nouns can be applied to people of either sex.

as The as ... as construction may be followed by a subject pronoun or an object pronoun: • She loves the child as much as he [as much as he does]. • She loves the child as much as him [as much as she loves him].

As in informal contexts the subject pronoun is sometimes replaced by the object pronoun, especially in simple comparisons: • as tall as me • as old as them. This usage, which is unacceptable to many people, should be avoided in formal contexts.

The as ... as construction is sometimes ambiguous: • She loves the child as much as her husband, for example, may mean 'she loves the child as much as her husband does' or 'she loves the child as much as she loves her husband'. In such cases the missing verb may be inserted for clarity.

The substitution of so ... as for so ... as in negative constructions is optional: • He is not as tall as his sister. When the construction is followed by an infinitive with to, however, so ... as is preferred: • I would not be so careless as to leave my car unlocked.

When the as ... as construction is followed by a comparative adjective or adverb, the second as is sometimes omitted in informal contexts but is retained by careful users in formal contexts: • Her car is as old (as) or older than mine. • He dances as badly (as) or worse than you.

The use of the as ... as construction when as alone is required, in the sense of 'though', is widely disliked in British English: • Tired as he was [not As tired as he was], he finished the race.

The dialectal use of as in place of that or who should be avoided in formal contexts: • I don't know that [not as] I agree. • the man who [not as] cleans our windows.

See also AS FAR AS; AS FROM; AS IF OR AS THOUGH?; AS PER; AS TO; AS WELL AS; AS YET; BECAUSE, AS, FOR OR SINCE?; COMPARATIVE AND SUPERLATIVE; LIKE, SUCH AS OR LIKE?

ascent see ASSENT OR ASCENT?

ascetic see AESTHETIC, ASCETIC OR ACETIC?

as far as The phrase as far as ... is concerned can often be replaced by a simple preposition: • The course is a waste of time for the more experienced students [not as far as the more experienced students are concerned].

as follows The phrase as follows should be used when introducing a list or other enumeration. Note that follows retains the -s ending regardless of whether it succeeds a singular or plural noun: • The conditions demanded by the hijackers are as follows. • The result is as follows.

as for see AS TO.

as from The phrase as from is best avoided where from, on, at, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • I shall be available for work from [not as from] next Monday. • Sunday deliveries will cease on [not as from] 1 November. • The increase will come into effect at [not as from] midnight.
Asian or Asiatic? Either word may be used as an adjective, meaning 'of Asia', or as a noun, denoting a native or inhabitant of Asia. Asian is preferred in both senses, the use of Asiatic with reference to people being considered racially offensive: • an Asian/Asiatic country • an Asian [not Asiatic] doctor • an Asian [not Asiatic] living in Europe.

See also INDIAN.

• The word Asian may be pronounced [əˈʃən] or [əˈʃeɪn], although [əˈʃən] is more common among younger people.

as if or as though? As if and as though are interchangeable in most contexts: • The car looked as if though it had been repaired. • She trembled, as if though aware of our presence. • He opened his mouth as if though to speak.

• As if is preferred in emphatic exclamations: • As if it mattered! • As if I needed your advice!

See also SUBJUNCTIVE; WERE OR WAS?

asocial see ANTISOCIAL, ASOCIAL, UNSOCIAL or UNSOCIALABLE?

as of see AS FROM.

as per The use of the phrase as per in place of according to is widely regarded as COMMERCIALESE: • as per instructions • as per the specifications.

• The use of the jocular expression as per usual in place of as usual is best restricted to informal contexts: • The train was ten minutes late, as (per) usual.

asphalt This word, used to describe a material used in road-surfacing, is often misspelt. Note particularly the -ph. The preferred pronunciation is [əˈfælt], although [əˈfælt] is also heard.

asphyxiate This word, meaning 'suffocate', is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the phy, as in physics.

assassinate This word, meaning 'murder an important person': • The president was assassinated, is often misspelt. Remember the -ss-, which occurs twice.

• The nouns assassin and assassination follow the same spelling pattern.

assent or ascent? These two words are sometimes confused, being identical in pronunciation. The noun assent means 'agreement' (see ASSENT or CONSENT?); the noun ascent means 'the act of ascending', 'a climb', or 'upward slope': • She gave her assent. • the ascent of Everest.

assent or consent? Either word may be used as a verb, meaning 'agree', or as a noun, meaning 'agreement'. The verb consent sometimes implies greater reluctance than assent: • They readily assented to our plan. • After hours of persuasion they consented to end the strike.

• The noun assent has connotations of acceptance or acquiescence, whereas the noun consent denotes approval or permission: • with the assent of my colleagues • without her parents' consent.

assertion or assertiveness? An assertion is a positive statement or declaration; assertiveness is the state of being dogmatic or aggressive: • to make an assertion • assertiveness training. Careful users maintain the distinction between the two nouns.

• The use of assertion in place of assertiveness is probably due to confusion with the noun self-assertion, which means 'putting oneself forward in a forceful or aggressive manner'.

assignment or assignment? Both these nouns may be used to denote the act of assigning: • the assignment/assignment of household chores.

• Assignment has the additional meaning of 'secret meeting'; assignment also means 'task': • an assignment with her lover • having completed his first assignment. The two words are not interchangeable in either of these senses.

assimilate This word, meaning 'absorb or integrate', is often misspelt. The only double letters are the -ss-.

• The verb assimilate should not be confused with simulate (see DESMELRING, DISMELULATE or SIMULATE?; SIMULATE or STIMULATE?).

assist The verb assist is followed by the preposition in or with: • He assisted her in or with her research.

sonance Acsonance, meaning 'the repetition of similar sounds in successive words', can be employed to striking effect in headlines or poetry, etc., but overuse is best avoided: • History's greatest mystery. • light-styling night.
assume or presume? In the sense of 'suppose' or 'take for granted' the verbs assume and presume are virtually inter-changeable: • I assume/presume you will accept their offer.
◆ In some contexts assume may suggest a hypothesis postulated without proof and presume a conclusion based on evidence: • He assumed she was an experienced player and did not offer her any advice. • From her performance in the opening game he presumed that she was an experienced player.

Both verbs have a number of additional senses. Assume means 'undertake', 'fight', or 'adopt': • to assume responsibility • to assume an air of astonishment • to assume a new name. Presume means 'dare' or 'take advantage of': • I did not presume to contradict him. • They presumed on our hospitality.

assurance or insurance? Both assurance and insurance are used to denote financial protection against a certainty, such as the death of the policyholder: • life assurance • life insurance.
◆ Of the two nouns only insurance is used with reference to financial protection against a possibility, such as fire, accidental damage, theft, or medical expenses: • motor insurance • household insurance • travel insurance • health insurance.

The noun assurance has a number of other meanings derived from the verb assure, such as 'guarantee' and 'confidence': • an assurance of help • an air of assurance.

See also ASSURE, ENSURE or INSURE?

assure, ensure or insure? To assure is to state with conviction or to convince; to ensure is to make certain; to insure is to protect financially: • He assured me that the carpet would not be damaged. • Please ensure that you do not damage the carpet. • I insured the carpet against accidental damage.
◆ In American English the word insure is sometimes used in place of ensure.

See also ASSURANCE or INSURANCE?

asthma This word, which describes the disorder that makes breathing difficult, is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent error being in the combination of the consonants asthma.
◆ It is not easy to pronounce the word in its entirety, and [asmə] is probably more frequently heard than the full pronunciation [əsthmə].

as though see AS IF or AS THOUGH?

as to Many people object to the unnecessary use of as to before whether, what, why, etc.: • There is some doubt (as to) whether she is suitably qualified. • He offered no explanation (as to) why he was late.
◆ As to is also best avoided where of, about, on, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • Please give me your opinion as to the efficiency of the system. • They received no warning as to the risks involved.

The phrase as to (or as for) may serve a useful purpose at the beginning of a sentence, in the sense of 'with regard to' or 'concerning': • As to the results of the survey, they will be published in next month's magazine. • As for his sister, she survived the accident.

astrology or astronomy? These two nouns are sometimes confused. Astrology is the study of the movements of the planets and their effect on human affairs; astronomy is the scientific study of the universe.

astronomical The use of the adjective astronomical in the sense of 'very large' is best restricted to informal contexts: • an astronomical increase in crime • astronomical prices.
◆ This usage probably originated in the very high figures required to express measurements in astronomy.

astronomy see ASTROLOGY or ASTRONOMY?

as well as When two or more verbs are linked by the phrase as well as, in the sense of 'in addition to', the verb that follows as well as is usually an -ing form: • The burglar broke a valuable ornament, as well as stealing all my jewellery. • As well as weeding the borders, the gardener pruned the roses and mowed the lawn.
◆ For the use of a singular or plural verb after nouns linked by as well as see SINGULAR OR PLURAL?

As well as is best avoided where there is a risk of confusion with the literal sense of the phrase: • Mark plays golf as well as Peter, for example, may mean 'both Mark and Peter play golf' or 'Mark and Peter are equally good at golf'.

as yet The phrase as yet, meaning 'up to now' or 'so far', is best avoided where yet would be adequate: • Have you sold any tickets yet (not as yet)? • I haven't sold any tickets (as) yet. • No tickets have been sold (as) yet. • Only a few tickets have been sold as yet.
at

The word at features in many e-mail addresses and is conventionally represented by the symbol @, usually placed between a person's name and their organization or Internet service provider: • Please send your reply to frsmith@nfscenter.com.

• The symbol @, again representing (and pronounced) at, may also be used in other technical contexts: • 200 packets @ $4 each. • 2,000 miles @ 23 miles per gallon and increasingly in non-technical contexts: • Come to a party @ our house.

at or in? At is traditionally used before the name of a village or small town, in before the name of a large town, city, country, etc.: • He lives at Keswick. • They stayed at Keswick. • She works in Southam.

• In some cases, both at and in may be used when the speaker or writer is referring to his or her own place of residence, work, etc.: • I live in Southampton.

In other contexts it generally indicates a more specific or precise position than in: • He lives in North Street. • He lives at 27 North Street. • She works in the bank.

• She works at Barclays Bank.

ate

This word, which is the past tense of the verb eat, is pronounced [et] or [ət] in British English.

• In American English the usual pronunciation is [æt], the pronunciation [ət] being considered non-standard.

-ate

A number of words ending in -ate may be used as adjectives (and/or nouns) and verbs. In these adjectives and nouns the ending -ate is pronounced [ət] in verbs it is pronounced [æt]. For example, the adjective animate is pronounced [əˌmənətə], whereas the verb is pronounced [əˌmənət] and the noun animate is pronounced [əˌmənət].

• At this moment in time Many people object to the frequent use of the cliché at this moment in time in place of now: • I am not in a position to comment on the situation at this moment in time.

attribute

The verb attribute, meaning 'attribute', is generally used with the preposition to: • They attributed the accident to careless driving. • To what do you attribute your success? • The idea was attributed to his colleague.

• The use of attribute with the preposition with, in the sense of 'credit', is wrong: • His colleague was credited [not attributed] with the idea.

Note the difference in pronunciation between the verb attribute [əˌtribjuːt] and the noun attribute [əˌtribjuːt].

See also stress.

attributive

See adjectives.

au fait

Au fait means 'familiar', 'informal', or 'competent': • Are you au fait with the procedure?

• The phrase au fait is of French origin and is sometimes written or printed in italics in English texts. It is pronounced [o fə] in English.

aural or oral?

These two words are sometimes confused, partly because they both often have the same pronunciation [oʊrəl]. Aural means 'of the ear or the sense of hearing', oral means 'of the mouth; expressed in speech'. An aural comprehension test a person's ability to understand a spoken language; an oral examination is one in which the questions and answers are spoken, not written.

• In order to distinguish aural and oral, the variant pronunciations [ɔːrəl] for aural and [ɔrəl] for oral are sometimes used.

Australianisms

There are fewer differences between Australian and British
English than between American and British English, probably because until comparatively recently nearly all settlers in Australia were British or Irish. The words that were adopted by the early settlers from the Aboriginal languages: • kula • boomerrang, are now in general use, and most British people are familiar with those Australian words which were coined in the context of the early days of European settlement: • outback • bushranger • swagman • digger • walkabout.

Although the speech of many Australians is not markedly different from British forms, for most British people Australian English is associated with the pronunciation known as Broad Australian or Strine. In the amusing book Let Stark Strive, published in 1965, examples are given of this characteristic pronunciation: • egg nashier (air conditioner) • garbler mince (couple of minutes) • chee semeritch (cheese sandwich). Australian English seems particularly adapted to informal use (the very formal British good day becomes the informal Australian greeting g'day) and it abounds in colourful slang. Although • cobber (mate) • dinkum (perfect) and • chunder (vomit) are now dated, other Australianisms, such as • pone (a British person) • sheila (woman) and • rubbish (as a verb, see nouns) remain widely familiar in Britain. Slang words are often formed by adding -er or -o to an abbreviated word: • barbie (barbecue) • garbo (refuse collector) • sickie (day taken off work for real or invented illness) • tinny (can of beer).

Australian spelling has traditionally been identical to British. In recent years, however, Australian spelling, as well as pronunciation and vocabulary, has been influenced by American English.

Australoid This word, describing a member of the indigenous aboriginal population of Australia and the southern Pacific, is avoided by careful users because of its potentially offensive racial connotations. Aboriginal is one of the preferred alternatives.

Author The use of the word author as a verb, in place of write, is disliked and avoided by careful users in all contexts: • She has written [not authored] a number of books on the subject.

On the use of authoress, see -ESS, NON-SEXIST TERMS.

Authoritarian or authoritative? The adjective authoritarian means favouring obedience to authority as opposed to individual freedom; authoritative means 'having authority' or 'official': • an authoritarian father • an authoritarian regime • an authoritarian policy • an authoritative voice • an authoritative article • an authoritative source.

The word authoritarian, which is also used as a noun, usually has derogatory connotations, whereas authoritative is generally used in a complimentary manner.

Authoritative is often misspelt, the most frequent error being the omission of the third or fourth syllable.

Avenge see REVENGE or AVENGE?

Averse see ADVERSE or AVERSE?

Avoid, evade or elude? Avoid means 'keep away from'; evade and elude mean 'avoid by cunning or deception': • He avoided the police by turning down a side street. • He evaded the police by hiding in the cellar. • He eluded the police by using a series of false names.

All three verbs have other senses and uses: • She managed to avoid damaging the car. • He is trying to evade his responsibilities. • Your name eludes me.

The difference between the terms tax avoidance and tax evasion, both of which relate to methods of reducing or minimizing tax liability, is that tax avoidance is legal and tax evasion is not.

Avoidance see AVOID, EVADE or ELUDE?

Await or wait? Await is principally used as a transitive verb, meaning 'wait for' or 'be in store for'; wait is chiefly used intransitively, often followed by for, in the sense of 'remain in readiness or expectation': • They awaited the verdict of the jury with trepidation. • I wonder what adventures await you in your new career. • She asked us to wait outside. • He waited for the rain to stop.

In the sense of 'wait for' await is largely restricted to formal contexts, where its direct object is usually an abstract noun. In other contexts wait for is preferred: • We're waiting for [not awaiting] a taxi.

Wait is used as a transitive verb in the phrase wait one's turn and similar expressions. The phrasal verb wait on means 'serve'; its use in place of wait for or await is disliked by many people: • They're waiting on the results.

Awake, awaken, wake or waken? All these verbs may be used transitively or intransitively in the literal senses of 'rouse
award-winning

or emerge from sleep' and the figurative senses of 'make or become aware': • Please
waken me at six o'clock. • He wakened earlier in
the summer. • Her sister's plight awakened her
to the problem faced by single parents. • They
awoke to the dangers of drug abuse. Wake and
waken are preferred in literal contexts and
awake and awaken in figurative contexts.

• The verb wake, which is more frequently used
than waken, is often followed by up: • Don't wake
the baby up. • I woke up in the middle of the night.
Wake and waken respectively are the usual forms
of the past tense and past participle of wake,
although waked is also used from time to time.
Wake is a regular verb.

Awaken and (less frequently) awake are also
used in the sense of 'arouse': • His absence from
work may awaken/awake her suspicions. The
usual forms of the past tense and past participle
of the verb awake are awake and awoken respecti
ively, awaked being an accepted variant. Like
waken, awaken is a regular verb.

The word awake is also used as an adjective,
meaning 'not asleep' or 'alert': • Did the children
manage to stay awake? • The police are awake to
the situation.

award-winning The adjective award-winn ing,
which is frequently used in advertising,
is meaningless unless the nature of the
award is specified: • an award-winning design • an award-winning writer.

• It is therefore best avoided or replaced with a
more precise synonym, such as excellent or
remarkable.

aware The use of the adjective aware
before the noun it qualifies, in the sense
of 'knowledgeable' or 'alert', is disliked by
many users: • one of our more aware students
• financially aware individuals.

• Aware is usually placed after a noun or pronoun
and is often followed by of: • I am aware of the
need for secrecy.

awesome The adjective awesome is used
as a slang term of approval, especially by
young people: • 'What was the party like?'
'Awesome!' In formal contexts it should be
restricted to the sense of 'inspiring ad-
miration or dread': • an awesome responsi-

awful see awfully.

awfully The use of the adverb awfully as
an intensifier is best restricted to informal
contexts: • I'm awfully sorry. • It's awfully
difficult to decide which to buy.

• The substitution of awful for awfully in this sense
is wrong.

... Ultimately derived from the noun awe, awful
and awfully are rarely used in their literal senses
('being inspired or filled with awe') today. Their
principal meanings in modern usage are 'bad' or
'badly': • The weather is awful. • They played
awfully in yesterday's match.

awhile or a while? Awhile and a while,
both referring to a brief period of time,
are used in different grammatical contexts.
Awhile is an adverb: • Come inside awhile,
but a while is a noun phrase, usually pre-
ceded by 'for': • Sit still for a while. awhile is
often preferred in poetical contexts.

axe In journaless the verb axe is frequently
used in the sense of 'dismiss', 'terminate',
'remove', etc.: • Britain's biggest teaching
union, the National Union of Teachers, is to
axe a third of its head office staff (Sunday Times). • Coloroll, the wallpaper and furnish-
ing company, is to axe 120 jobs (Daily Tele-
graph). • Saturday Review, the BBC's current
art magazine programme . . . will be axed
after a final series starring in October (Sunday Times).

• This usage is best avoided in general contexts.

axes Axes is the plural of axe or axis: • axes
for chopping wood • the horizontal and
vertical axes. The plural of axe is pro-
nounced [ækz] and the plural of axis is
pronounced [ækz].
-babble Many people dislike the increasing use of the suffix -babble to coin new words for particularly incomprehensible types of jargon: • technobabble • psychobabble • Eurobabble • cockababble.

See also -speak.

babe Babe is a slang term frequently applied approvingly to a sexually attractive young woman or (increasingly) man. Because it focuses on a person's superficial attributes, without reference to character or intelligence, the word may cause offence: • He walked in with a long-legged babe on each arm. • Her brother is a real babe.

bachelor This word, meaning 'unmarried man': • a confirmed bachelor, is sometimes misspelt. The most frequent error is to insert a t before the ch.

back This word can be a cause of confusion when used in relation to time. When referring to the past, back refers to a change to an earlier time: • The date of the temple has been pushed back 1000 years (i.e. 1000 years earlier than previously thought).

When referring to the future, back refers to a change to a later time: • Because of this difficulty, hopes of a successful Mars landing have been pushed back another 20 years (i.e. 20 years later than previously expected).

back burner The phrase on the back burner is often used, especially in informal contexts, in the figurative sense of 'deferred' or 'postponed': • People are examining things on a long-term basis, not on an expedient basis,' a London Underground spokeswoman said. Priorities will be made, and some things will be put on a back burner.' (The Guardian). Care should be taken not to overuse this phrase.

back formation Back formation is a way of creating new words, usually verbs, by removing an affix from an existing word: • donate (from donation) • extradite (from extradition). Many such words have been used for so long that they are no longer recognized as back formations: • edit (from editor) • laze (from lazy) • burgle (from burglar) • enthuse (from enthusiasm).

Back formations often arise as a result of false assumptions about the composition of a word. People hearing the word scavenger might assume incorrectly that the noun comes from a verb scavenging. William Banting, during his time, invented a system of diet which became known as the banting system, which in turn gave rise to the verb to bant.

New verbs are regularly being formed in this way: • televise • automate • expletive • euthanase.

Many, like liaise (from liaison), are disliked when newly coined, but when such verbs are created from a genuine need for them in the language, they tend to be retained.

background Some people object to the use of the word background to mean 'the circumstances that relate to, lead up to, or explain an event or experience', preferring to use such words as circumstances, conditions, context, or setting instead.

• Recently background has also been used for a person's work or professional experience and training: • The successful applicant will probably have a good background (Executive Post).

backlash Backlash is used metaphorically to describe a strong adverse reaction to a recent event or political/social development or tendency: • the backlash against the Government's radical new changes in education policy.

• The metaphor suggests a sudden reaction, but in fact the word is often used in describing a gradual reaction, perhaps over years: • The philosophy of the New Right can be seen as a backlash against the pacifism and permissiveness of the 1960s.

back of The phrases back of and in back of, meaning 'behind', are largely restricted to American English and are avoided elsewhere, although the opposite phrase, in
backward

front of, is universally accepted: • The car was parked in back of the hotel. • A bomb had been placed back of the building.

backward or backwards? In British English backward is principally used as an adjective, backwards being the usual form of the adverb meaning 'towards the back' or 'in reverse': • a backward step • a backward child • walking backwards • written backwards.

• The adverb backward is more frequently used in American English.

See also -WARD or -WARDS?

bacteria The term bacteria refers to all microorganisms exhibiting certain characteristics. They are thought of as disease-bearing, but in fact many are harmless and some essential to human life, although others do cause disease.

• Bacteria is a plural noun so expressions like: • I think it's caused by a bacteria are incorrect; the singular term is bacterium.

bad The adjective bad is used as a slang term of approval, especially by young people. The potential ambiguity of this usage is obvious.

See also WICKED.

• This sense derives originally from American black English.

bade Bade is a form of the past tense of the verb bid: • He bade them farewell. Its traditional pronunciation is [bad], but [bayd] is also acceptable.

baguette The noun baguette, describing a long narrow French loaf, is sometimes misspelt. Note the -guette ending.

bail or bale? The spellings of these words are often confused. The primary senses of these words are as follows. Bail is the security deposited as a guarantee of the appearance of an arrested person; a bale is a large quantity of hay, old newspapers, etc. The associated verbs also follow these spellings: • Duties was released on £10,000 bail. • His friends bailed him out for £10,000. • bales of old papers • to bale hay.

• In the senses of scooping water out of a boat, helping someone out of a difficult situation, and escaping from an aircraft in an emergency by using a parachute, either bail out or bale out can be used.

The bails are the two crosspieces over the stumps in cricket.

baited or baited? These two words are occasionally confused. Baited means 'provoked or teased' or 'hooked or trapped with food to attract a fish or animal'. Baited is used only in the expression with baited breath, meaning 'tense with anxiety or excitement': • They waited for news of the missing child with baited breath.

balance Some people dislike the frequent use of the noun balance in the sense of 'remainder', especially in nonfinancial contexts: • The balance of the work will be completed by the end of the month.

bail see BAIL or BALE?

baleful or baneful? The adjective baleful means 'harmful' or 'menacing': • a baleful stare. It should not be confused with the adjective baneful, meaning 'destructive' or 'fatal', which is very rare in modern usage.

balk or baulk? Either spelling may be used for this word: • He balked [or baulked] at paying such a high price. • The horse balked [or baulked] at the fence. • As usual he was balked [or baulked] in her ambitions by a man.

ball game or ballpark? Both these terms have informal idiomic uses, of American origin. In the phrase a whole new ball game, ball game means 'state of affairs'; in the phrases in the right ballpark and not in the same ballpark, ballpark means 'range' or 'area': • a ballpark figure is an estimate or approximate figure. The two terms are sometimes confused, producing such expressions as: • It was a completely new ballpark.

balmy or barmy? These words are sometimes confused. Balmy means 'mild and pleasant': • a balmy evening. Barmy, an informal word in British English, means 'foolish': • I've never heard of such a barmy idea!

• Balmy derives from balm, a plant with fragrant leaves that is used for flavouring foods and for scenting perfumes. The word derives from the Latin balsamum 'balsam'. Barmy comes from the Old English barm, 'the yeasty froth of fermenting beer'.

In American English and sometimes in British English, balmy is the main spelling for both senses. baneful see BALEFUL or BANEFUL?
banister A banister, a handrail supported by posts fixed alongside a staircase, has the less common variant spelling banister.

baptismal name see first name, Christian name, forename, given name or baptismal name?

barbarian, barbaric or barbarous? Barbaric means 'crude, primitive, uncivilized': • They discovered a barbaric tribe living in the bush; or sometimes merely 'uncultured, unsophisticated': • Most teenagers have barbaric tastes in music. Barbarian as a noun means 'someone living barbarically' and as an adjective is synonymous with barbaric. Barbarous means 'cruel, harsh, or inhumane'; • Torture is condemned as a barbarous practice.

barbecue The word barbecue is often misspelt. The most frequent error is the substitution of -que for the -cue ending, perhaps influenced by advertisements that use the nonstandard phonetic spelling bar-\text{cq}.

bare or bear? Care should be taken not to confuse the spelling of the adjective bare, meaning 'naked' or 'simple', with that of the noun bear, referring to the animal, and the verb bear, meaning 'support', 'withstand', 'give birth to', etc. All three words are pronounced the same: [bair].

barely see hardly.

barman or barmy? see non-sexist terms.

barmy see balm or barmy?

base or basis? Both base and basis mean 'a foundation, substructure, or support': Base is usually used to refer to the bottom support of a tangible object: • the base of a pillar, while basis is used for abstract or theoretical foundations: • on the basis of all the evidence received • The new pay scale provides a sound basis for the new contract • on a daily basis. Careful writers avoid the overuse of basis.

• Base is also used to mean 'a principal ingredient': • The cocktail has a whisky base, and 'a centre', as in: • We used the flat as our London base. Base can be used as a verb: • The company is based in Sheffield, and as an adjective: • base unit.

The plural of both base and basis is bases but the plural of basis is pronounced [baysiz] and the plural of base [baysez].

base or bass? The noun base means 'a foundation, substructure, or support'; the noun bass means 'a voice, instrument, or sound of the lowest range': • The company has been established on a sound base. • He sings bass in the local choir. The two words are pronounced the same [bays]. The fish bass is pronounced [bas].

basically The literal sense of basically is 'concerning a base or basis, fundamentally': • His argument has a superficial persuasiveness but it is basically flawed. • I believe she is basically a good person.

• It is often used to mean no more than 'importantly'; • It is basically the case that fats can cause heart disease; and it has recently become fashionable to put it at the beginning of a sentence, where its presence is often wholly superfluous. This usage is disliked by some; • Basically, I don't think he should have been offered the job.

basis see base or basis?

bass see base or bass?

bastard This word, meaning 'person born to unmarried parents', should be used with caution as many people find it offensive when used in this original sense. In its alternative use as a slang term for a despicable or unlikeable person bastard is, however, increasingly considered a relatively mild term of abuse, especially when referring to something inanimate: • That machine can be a real bastard to control. It is equally likely to be encountered as a term of jocular affection or sympathy: • You lucky bastard! • He lost all his money on the horses, poor bastard.

bated see baited or bated?

bath or bathe? In British English the verb bath means 'have a bath (in a bathroom)', or 'wash someone else in a bath': • bath the baby, while the noun means 'the vessel in which one baths, or the act of washing in a bath'. Bathe means 'immerse in liquid, apply water or soothing liquid to (a wound)', or 'swim, usually in the sea, for pleasure': • Who's coming for a bathe? In American English bathe is used to mean 'have a bath' and does not have the transitive use of bath.
bathos

- Bath is pronounced [bɑːθ] and bathe [bæθ]. The past tense of both verbs is bathed and the present participle bathing, but the pronunciation differs: bath [bɑːθɪŋ]; bathe [bæθɪŋ]; [bɑːθɪŋ].

bathos or pathos? Bathos means 'antidrama' and is used in literary criticism to describe a sudden change from something serious or grand to something absurd or commonplace. The word pathos is used more frequently and in less specialized contexts to refer to a quality that evokes pity or compassion: • the play highlights the pathos of pain and mortality.

- Both words are Greek in origin; bathos means 'depth'; pathos means 'suffering, experience, emotion'. The derived adjectives are bathetic and pathetic.

bathroom see toilet, lavatory, loo or bathroom.

battalion The word battalion, denoting a military unit, is sometimes misspelt. Note the consonants -t- and -l-, which are the same as those in the word battle.

baulk see balk or baulk?

BC see AD and BC.

be The infinitive be is used in some British dialects in place of other parts of the verb: • It be a fine day. In standard speech it is used mainly in imperatives: • Be quiet, after to: • You ought to be careful, and after an auxiliary verb: • He should be home soon.

- Two common uses after an auxiliary verb concern age and money: • She'll be 40 tomorrow, • That'll be £10 exactly. Be is often used to mean 'become': • What do you want to be when you grow up?

beach or beech? These two words are occasionally confused since they are pronounced in the same way [beech]. The noun beach means 'strip of sand or pebbles on a shoreline'; the noun beech refers to a species of tree with greyish bark and shiny leaves. • There were hundreds of tourists on the beach. • The old beech fell during the storm.

bear see bare or bear?

beat or beaten? Beat is the past tense and beaten the past participle of the verb beat. • He beat the eggs. • She has beaten the champion.

- The use of beat as a variant form of the past participle is largely restricted to the informal phrase • dead beat, meaning 'exhausted'.

beat or beat? These two words are occasionally confused since they are pronounced in the same way [beat]. The verb and noun beat should not be confused with the noun beet, which refers in British English to sugar beet and in American English to beetroots: • He beat the iron into a rough circle. • The following year the field was planted with beet.

beautiful This word, meaning 'delightful to the senses': • a beautiful woman • a beautiful sunset, is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the first letters beau.

- The word derives from the Old French word beau and comes ultimately from the Latin bellus, meaning 'pretty'.

because The conjunction because means 'for the reason that': • You're cold because you need warmer clothes.

- It is often used incorrectly in such constructions as: • The reason her accent is so good is because her mother is French, which should be: Her accent is so good because her mother is French, or: The reason for her accent being so good is that her mother is French. Another mistaken use of because is to mean 'the fact that': • Because he's deaf doesn't mean he's deaf.

See also NOT; reason.

because, as, for or since? All these words are used to introduce clauses which give the reason for whatever has been said in the main clause.

- As and since are similar in use, although since is rather more formal. They are used more often at the beginning of a sentence than because, and tend to be used when the reason is already well known or when the reason is considered not as important as the main statement: • As you're only staying a little while, we'd better have tea now. • He refrained from smoking between courses since he knew that was generally thought to be impolite. • As since we went there in the summer, the weather was gloriously hot. Because tends to put the emphasis on the cause: • He married her because she was rich. Because is also sometimes used to introduce a reason for stating a fact: • You must have forgotten to invite him, because he didn't turn up. For would be better here although
it would have a more formal sound. For always
comes between the elements it joins and places
equal emphasis on the main statement and the
reason: • She never saw him again, for he returned
to Greece soon afterwards.

Ambiguity in the use of as should be avoided,
since it can mean both 'while' and 'because': • As
Hugh went out to do the shopping, Sandra looked
after the baby.

because of see DUE TO, OWING TO or BECAUSE
of?

beech see BEACH or BEECH?

been there, done that This phrase, ex-
pressing a blase response to some sugges-
tion or invitation to do something, is of
relatively recent coinage but has already
acquired cliché status and many people
avoid using it for this reason: • Aquaboding?
Been there, done that. It is occasionally
heard in its fuller form been there, done that,
bought the tee-shirt.

beer or bier? These two words are oc-
casionally confused since they are pro-
nounced in the same way [bər]. The
noun beer refers to the alcoholic drink
made from hops; the noun bier describes
the platform or stand upon which a coffin
or corpse may be placed before burial or
cremation: • The waiter brought them two
pints of beer. • The princess's lifeless body was
placed upon a bier in the chapel.

beet see BEAT or BEET?

befriend Some people dislike the increasing
use of the verb befriend in the sense of
'make friends with': • She soon befriended
her new neighbours. The traditional mean-
ing of the verb is 'act as a friend to (by
giving assistance or showing kindness)': •
They befriended me when I first came to work
at the hospital.

beggar This word, describing a person
who begs, is sometimes misspelt. Note the
ending -er, not -er.
• This spelling is different from other 'doer' words
such as hunter, miner, and writer.

begin The verb begin is followed by the
preposition with in the sense of 'have some-
thing at the beginning': • The word 'knee'
begin with the letter K. When referring to
doing or saying something as the first part of
an activity, begin is followed by the
preposition by: • Begin by mixing the dry
ingredients. • He began by thanking the
visiting speaker.

beg the question To beg the question is
sometimes used as if it meant ' evade the
question skilfully ' or ' raise the question '. Its
principal meaning, and the only one ac-
cepted by some people, is 'base an argu-
ment on an assumption whose truth is the
very thing that is being disputed'.
• For example, to argue that God must exist
because one can see evidence of its creation in
the natural beautes that surround us is begging
the question, for the premise that these natural
beautes are evidence of God's creation is un-
proved, and dependent on the truth of God's
existence, which is supposed to be the conclusion
of the argument.

behalf To speak or act on behalf of some-
one else is to act as the representative of
that person or those people: • I am speaking
on behalf of my union.
• In American English in behalf of is also used
and a distinction is sometimes drawn between on
behalf (acting for) and in behalf (in the interest
of). A frequent mistake is to use on behalf instead
of on the part: • That was a serious error on behalf
of the Government.

beige This word, describing a very pale
brown colour, is sometimes misspelt. Note the
er and the soft g.

See also SPELLING S.

bells and whistles The phrase bells and
whistles is used in informal English to refer
to the nonessential facilities and special
features that are used to promote sales of
a particular computer, software package, or
similar product: • This system's got fewer
bells and whistles, but it's half the price. The
phrase should not be overused.

beloved This word, meaning 'dearly
loved', may be pronounced [bəl̬vəd] or
[bəl̬vəd]. Either is acceptable.

below, beneath, under or underneath?
These words all mean 'lower than', and the
distinctions between them are subtle.
• Below and under are often synonymous; below
is contrasted with above, and under with over.
Below alone is used to refer to written material
following: • See chapter 5 below, and is more
often used in comparison of levels: • She lives in
the flat below. • He was below me in rank. Under's
beneficent

used in reference to being subject to authority: • He served under Montgomery. Underneath is used mainly for physical situations, and often suggests proximity. • She kept her savings underneath her mattress. Beneath can be synonymous with underneath but sounds either old-fashioned or poetic; it is now used mainly to mean 'unworthy of': • beneath contempt.

beneficent, beneficial

see benevolent, beneficent or beneficial

benefit

Note the single -f- in the spelling of the past tense: • benefited and the present participle: • benefiting.

The -f- is not doubled, because the syllable containing this consonant is not stressed. The verb benefit is followed by from or by: • Most old age pensioners will benefit from [or by] these changes in taxation.

See also spelling 1.

benevolent, beneficent, beneficial or beneficial? These are all adjectives suggestive of doing or intending good. Beneficent means 'disposed to do good; charitable': • a donation from a beneficent well-wisher. Beneficent means 'kind, mild, and well-disposed' and can be used of things as well as people: • a beneficent climate; it is also used as a medical term meaning 'non-cancerous': • a benign tumour. Beneficent means 'doing good; promoting good' and is used of people, while beneficial means 'promoting good or well-being' and is often used of things: • The waters are said to be beneficial to one's health.

bereft

Bereft was formerly synonymous with bereaved but is now used mainly to suggest loss or deprivation of any nonmaterial thing: • He was now bereft of all hope.

When used of death, bereft suggests the desolation of loss more forcefully than does bereaved: • A year after his death she still wandered through the silent house, bereft. It should not be used merely as a synonym for 'without', with no sense of loss, as in: • I was unable to help, being bereft of any mechanical skill.

beside or besides?

Beside means literally 'by the side of': • Come and sit beside me, and is also used in the expression beside oneself, meaning 'extremely agitated': • He was beside himself with grief. Besides can mean 'moreover': • I won't be able to go; besides, I don't want to, 'as well as'; • Besides the usual curries, the restaurant offers some unusual tandoori specialties, and except for; other than: • He's interested in nothing besides cricket.

This last use is always inclusive, not exclusive as with except: • Besides Ben, my colleagues are all Jewish implies that Ben is Jewish; while Except for Ben... implies that he is not.

best or better?

Careful writers prefer better when comparing two persons or things, reserving best for comparisons between a larger number of persons or things or in idiomatic contexts: • On the night they proved the better of the two teams. • This painting is the best in the exhibition. • She had decided to keep the best till last.

See also comparative or superlative.

best-before date

see sell-by date.

best-selling

Best-selling is the adjective derived from best-seller, which is applied to anything which has sold very well, but particularly a book which has sold a great number of copies: • Stephen Hawking, author of the best-selling book A Brief History of Time. The term best-selling is applied to the author as well as to the books: • best-selling novelist, Frederick Forsyth.

bet or batted?

Bet is the usual form of the past tense and past participle: • They bet me £10 I wouldn't do it.

Batted is a much rarer word, preferred in more general intransitive contexts: • He has never batted in his life, but even here a phrase such as place a bet is more common: • He has never placed a bet in his life.

bête noire

A bête noire is something that a person fears or hates: • Rock music is her bête noire. The phrase is of French origin and is sometimes written or printed in italics in English texts.

Note the spelling of the phrase, particularly the accent on the first -e- and the -e- ending of noire. The plural is formed by adding s to both words: • What are your bétes noires?

beted

see bet or betted?

better

The phrase had better means 'ought to' or 'should': • You had better close the window. • She'd better stay here. Careful users do not drop the word had (or its contraction 'd), even in informal contexts: • I'd better apologize, not I better apologize.

This last form, without had or 'd, is common in informal speech, but it should be avoided when writing.
The negative form of the phrase is had better not: *He hadn't better not be late.*

See also **best** or **better**.

**between** The preposition *between* is used either before a plural noun: *the interval between the acts* or in conjunction with and; it should not be used with or: *You must choose between your family life and your work.*

*Between* should not be used with each or every followed by a singular noun: *There is a gap of one foot between the skittles [not between each skittle].*

See also **I or me**.

**between or among** *Between* is traditionally used when speaking of the relationship of two things, and *among* of three or more:
- There was a clear hostility between George and Henry.
- There was dissent among the committee members.

*However, in current usage* *between* *is acceptable as a substitute for* *among*: *agreement between the NATO countries, although* *among* *is still only used for several elements.* *Between* is also used when discussing the joint activities of a group: *The carol-singers collected £50 between them, and in the expression between ourselves, meaning 'in confidence':* *Between ourselves, I think he's heading for a nervous breakdown.*

See also **among or amongst**.

**bi**- The prefix *bi-* always means 'two' but sometimes in the sense of doubling: *bicycle* *bifocal,* and sometimes halving: *bisection.* This is particularly confusing with words like *biweekly,* which sometimes means 'every two weeks' and sometimes 'twice a week.' It is probably best to avoid *biweekly* and *bimonthly* and express in a fuller form what is intended.

*Biannual* means 'twice a year,' while *biennial* means 'every two years'.

A *bicentenary* (or *bicentennial*) is a 200th anniversary. *Bicentennial* is used more frequently in American English and can also be used as an adjective: *bicentennial celebrations.*

**bias** The doubling of the final *s* of the word *bias* before a suffix beginning with a vowel is optional. Most dictionaries give *biased,* with *biased* as an acceptable alternative.

See also **spelling 1**.

**Bible** or **bible**? The noun *Bible* is spelt with a capital *B* when it refers to the sacred writings of the Christian religion: *the first book of the Bible, a Bible reading.* When the noun refers to a copy of the book containing these writings, it may be spelt with a lower-case *b-*: *I bought her a bible for Christmas.* The noun is also spelt with a lower-case *b-* when it refers to an authoritative book on a particular subject: *the gardener's bible.*

*The adjective* *biblical* *is usually spelt with a lower-case* *b-*: *in biblical times.*

**bid** The noun *bid,* normally meaning 'an offer,' takes on a new meaning in popular journalism, where it is used, particularly in headlines, to mean 'an attempt or effort': *Athlete's bid for title: Rescue bid fails: Vicar's bid to cut family breakdowns.*

**biennial** see **ANNUAL, BIENNIAL or PERENNIAL?**

**bier** see **BEER or BIER?**

**big bang** The *big-bang theory* is a cosmological theory that suggests that the universe originated in an explosion of a mass of material.

*The Big Bang* was also used to describe the radical reorganisation of the London Stock Exchange which took place in 1986. The term is increasingly used in general contexts to denote any sudden radical change or reform: *the big-bang approach to solving the problems of the National Health Service.*

**big brother** The phrase *big brother* refers to a person or organization that observes and controls the lives of others. It was coined by George Orwell in his book *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), describing a totalitarian state, and was subsequently applied to any action by a government or similar body that is considered to be an invasion of privacy, such as the installation of CCTV cameras or the monitoring of personal Internet use and e-mail communications. The phrase was substantially revived in the late 1990s through the television show *Big Brother,* which was seen in many countries around the globe.

**billion** *Billion* has traditionally meant 'one million million' in Britain. However, in the United States it means 'one thousand million' and this usage has been increasingly adopted in Britain and internationally.
bi-  The prefix bi- comes from the Greek word *bio* meaning 'life', and words beginning with it have a connection with life or living organisms: *biology, biography*.  There are several recently coined words having the bi-prefix: *bic* 'the application of knowledge about living systems to the development of artificial systems' *biodegradable* 'able to decompose organically without harming the environment' *bioethics* 'study of moral problems connected with issues like euthanasia, surrogate motherhood, genetic engineering, etc.' *biometrics* 'statistical analysis of biological data' *bioweapon* 'a missile or other weapon containing harmful bacteria' *bioterrorism* 'the employment of biological warfare by terrorists'.

bivouac  The verb bivouac adds a *-e* before the suffixes *-ed* and *-ing*. *We bivouacked halfway up the mountain.* See also SPELLING.

bizarre  Note the spelling of this word, meaning 'eccentric or odd', particularly the single *-e* and the *-rr*.

Do not confuse bizarre with bazaar, 'a type of market'.

black  Black is the word now usually applied in British English to dark-skinned people of Afro-Caribbean origin, sometimes extended to include other non-white races. It is broadly acceptable to most black people, although *African American* has replaced it to a substantial degree in American English among people of African descent: *black power, black consciousness*. Coloured is considered offensive as it groups all non-white people. Under the former policy of apartheid in South Africa it was a technical term used to refer to South Africans of mixed descent. The terms *Neger* and *Negress* are also considered offensive.

Black is used in many words and phrases, usually having negative connotations: *black magic, blackmail, black market*. Some black people resent the association of the colour black with evil and unpleasantness and, while it is difficult to find synonyms for established words like blackmail, it is desirable to avoid such possibly offensive terms as: *a black look, an accident black spot, blacken someone's name*.

black hole  The term black hole, originally used in astronomy, is increasingly found in figurative contexts, where it is used with a variety of meanings: If a region of the UK gets into trouble through high wages, under-investment or because it is regarded by business as an economic black hole, Whitehall can bail it out with grants (The Guardian).

In astronomy, a black hole is a hypothetical region of space with such a high gravitational field that nothing can escape from it.

blame  Blame, as a verb, means 'hold responsible; place responsibility on': *He was blamed for the accident*. The expression blame (it) on: *They all blame it on me* is disliked by some careful users, who would substitute: *They blame me for it or: They put the blame on me*. However, the usage is well-established and is acceptable in all but very formal contexts.

blanch or bleach? Both these verbs mean 'make or become white' or 'make or become pale'. Blanch may be applied to people or things and is more frequently used as a transitive verb: *The sun had blanched the rug*. *Her face was blanched with fear*. Bleach is chiefly applied to people and is more frequently used as an intransitive verb: *He blanched with shock*.

In this sense the verb bleach is a variant of Blanch, which is derived from the Old French blanc 'white'. There is an unrelated verb bleach, meaning 'recoil (in fear)', which is derived from the Old English blæcan 'to deceive'.

In cookery, the verb bleach refers to the process of immersing vegetables, nuts, etc., in boiling water: *blanched almonds*.

blatant or flagrant? Blatant and flagrant are both concerned with overtly offensive behaviour but their usage is not identical. Blatant means 'crassly and conspicuously obvious': *The article was blatant propa-
ganda. Flagrant means 'conspicuously shocking or outrageous' • The European parliament sees the tougher measures as a 'flagrant violation of human rights and justice' (Sunday Times).

blench see BLANCH or BLENCH?

blends A blend, also known as a portmanteau word, is a new word that is formed by joining parts of two other words, usually the beginning of one and the end of the other, such as: • brunch (breakfast + lunch) • motel (motor + hotel). Many of these words fill a genuine gap in the English language; others are best restricted to informal contexts.

Some people dislike the increasing number of neologisms coined in this way: • camcorder (video camera + recorder) • docudrama (documentary + drama) • infotainment (information + entertainment) • Japanimation (Japanese + animation) • affluenza (affluence + influence).

blessed This word sometimes causes problems with pronunciation. The word blessed, the past tense of the verb bless: • He blessed the child, is pronounced [bless]. The noun or adjective blessed: • the Blessed Sacrament, is usually pronounced [blessed] but is occasionally pronounced [blesst].

blind Because of its negative associations, and because there are many different degrees of visual impairment, the word blind is increasingly avoided by careful writers in general reference to people who have difficulties with their eyesight. It is especially important to avoid the impersonal plural form the blind. Preferred terms, depending upon the loss of vision involved, include visually impaired, visually challenged, unsighted, and partially sighted: • The hotel has been redesigned throughout to accommodate the needs of visually impaired guests.

blip Blip, a term used in radar, has developed the figurative sense of 'sudden change or interruption: temporary minor problem'. It became a vogue word in the late 1980s when the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson, dismissed a sudden rise in the Retail Price Index as a 'temporary blip'. The word should not be overused in this figurative sense.

• A blip on a radar screen is the sharp peak or flash of light that indicates the position of something.

bloc or block? The noun bloc denotes a group of people or nations that have political aims or interests in common: • the Communist bloc. It should not be confused with block, which has a wide range of meanings and uses: • a block of wood • a mental block • a block of flats.

blond or blonde? These two spellings of the word meaning 'light in colour' are sometimes a cause of confusion. As a noun, blonde is generally reserved for a girl or woman with fair hair, while blond may refer to fair-haired people of either sex. As an adjective, the distinction between blond and blonde is frequently ignored and both may be employed for either sex, although blonde is more common in British English: • She is a blonde. • A blond man entered the room. • Both brother and sister have blonde hair.

blue The verb blue has the slang sense 'squander': • He blused the prize money on drink. It is synonymous with the verb blow, used in the slang sense 'spend freely or recklessly': • She blew her inheritance. The two verbs are virtually interchangeable; neither should be used in formal contexts. Ambiguity or confusion may arise from the fact that blue (present tense of blow) and blew (past tense of blow) are identical in pronunciation.

blue-chip Blue-chip is originally a Stock Market term referring to a share issue which is considered to be both reliable and profitable: • a blue-chip investment.

It is extended to companies and any extremely worthwhile asset or property, • one of the world’s most successful manufacturers . . . with a blue-chip reputation (Sunday Times). The meaning has now become further extended, to 'fashionable and exclusive' or 'of the highest standard': • polo, the blue-chip sport (Daily Telegraph) • Parents in Britain believe they are entitled to blue-chip facilities when they go out and about with their children (Daily Telegraph). Many people dislike the use of the word in this way.

blue-sky This is a vogue term describing wild, ambitious, or purely theoretical research, thinking, etc.: • One day, childcare could be up there along with health, education and transport as one of the government’s big
blueprint

spending departments. But that's blue-sky thinking for now. (The Guardian). It should not be overlooked in usual contexts.

Blueprin A blueprint is literally a print used for mechanical drawing, engineering, and architectural designs. The word is used metaphorically to mean any plan, scheme, or prototype: • a blueprint for a successful life • the London launch of a policy document. A Blueprint for Urban Areas' (The Times). Although a literal blueprint is a finished plan, the metaphorical use, very popular as a jargon and journalistic term, is just as often applied to preliminary schemes. Care should be taken, however, not to overuse this word.

Blush or flush? Both these verbs mean 'going red in the face'. To blush may be a sign of modesty, embarrassment, shame, or guilt; to flush may indicate any of these emotions as well as stronger feelings, such as anger, or the effects of alcohol or physical causes. • The verb flush is also used transitively, often in the passive or in the form of the past participial adjective: • He was flushed with rage. To be flushed may also indicate excitement or the result of exertion or illness: • You look flushed—have you got a temperature? Blush cannot be used in this way.

Board or bored? The noun board variously denotes a flat piece of wood or other material, a group of people chosen to head an organization, dally rations of food, etc.: • a sheet of board over the window • suggestions put before the board • to set out in search of board and lodging. It should not be confused with bored, past participle of the verb bore: • She quickly grew bored with the work.

Boat or ship? The use of boat or ship is mainly a matter of size. Boat is usually applied to smaller vessels, especially those that stay in shallow or sheltered waters: • a rowing boat • lifeboat, and ship to larger vessels that travel the open seas: • steamship • warship.

Bona fide Bona fide is an adjective meaning 'of good faith; genuine or sincere': • I will accept any bona fide offer. Bona fides is a singular noun, meaning 'good faith, sincerity, honest intention': • He had no documentary proof but we did not doubt his bona fides.

Bona fide is also sometimes used to mean 'authentic' as in: • It's not a reproduction; it's a bona fide Matise.


Bored or bored with? Careful users avoid the construction bored of except in very informal contexts, preferring bored with or bored by: • He was soon bored with tidying up. • Modern audiences are bored by old-fashioned farces.

See also BOARD or BORED?

Borne or borne? These two spellings are sometimes confused. Borne is the past participle of the verb bear: • They had borne enough pain. • The following points should be borne in mind. • His account is simply not borne out by the facts. • airborne supplies. In the sense of 'giving birth', borne is used in phrases where the mother is the subject: • She has borne six children, and also in the passive with by: • borne by her. Born is used for all other passive constructions without by: • He was born in Italy. • Twins were born to her. • a born leader • his Burmeese-born wife.

Born-again The term born-again was originally confined to the context of evangelical Christianity, to mean 'converted': • a born-again believer.

The term is now often used generally to refer to a conversion to any cause or belief, particularly when accompanied by extreme enthusiasm or fervour: • a born-again conservationist • Having declared himself born again as a Republican, he set about nurturing old contacts within the party. Occasionally, born-again is also used to mean 'renewed; fresh, new, or resurgent': • a born-again car • born-again post offices with refurbished premises • the mini-skirt appears to have been born again.

The origin of the term born again is John 3:3 in the Bible.

Borne see BORN or BORNE?

Borrow Besides its literal meaning of 'take something for a limited period with the intention of returning it': • I borrowed this book from the library, borrow can also be
used metaphorically to refer to words, ideas, etc., taken from other sources: • Wagner borrowed this theme from Norse mythology. • Some American slang is borrowed from Yiddish.

One borrows from, not off someone: • I borrowed it off my friend is generally considered wrong.

See also LEND or LOAN.

both Both is used as an adjective, a pronoun, a conjunction, and an adverb: • Both legs were amputated. • I like both. • He is both an artist and a writer. • The room has both hot and cold water. It should not be used where more than two elements are involved, as in: • She's both selfish, mean, and malicious.

The constructions • Both his parents are teachers and • Both of his parents are teachers are equally acceptable. However, in possessive constructions with us, them, etc., it is usually necessary to use of: • the opinion of both of them, not both of their opinions.

When two things are being considered separately, it is often better to use each to avoid ambiguity. • We were both given a box of chocolates might involve two boxes or one shared box. In general one should be careful about placing the word both in order to avoid ambiguity. • He has insulted both his aunts and his grandmother might suggest his two aunts.

Both as a conjunction goes with and, and as with all such pairs of conjunctions must link grammatically similar things. So one can say: • She is both charming and intelligent but not She is both charming and an intellectual.

Both is often used redundantly, when some other phrase in the sentence conveys the same sense: • They are both identical. • Both of them are equally to blame.

cornucopia A cornucopia is a term originally applied only to narrow stretches of road which cause traffic hold-ups. It is now extended to anything that holds up free movement or progress: • A bottleneck at the Traffic Area Office is resulting in long waits for driving tests.

As a vague word it is sometimes overworked and its literal meaning forgotten. The original metaphor refers to the narrowness of the neck of a bottle, which makes such phrases as: • an enormous bottleneck • an increasing bottleneck • reducing the bottleneck absurd.

bottom line Bottom line is a vague expression, taken from financial reports where the final line registers the net profit or loss. It can mean 'the most important or primary point or consideration': • The bottom line is that we have no more resources for the project; or 'the final result': • The bottom line was their divorce. Care should be taken not to oversuse this phrase.

It is also sometimes used as an adjective to mean 'having a pragmatic concern for cost and profit': • He has a bottom-line approach to running the company.

bottom out To bottom out was formerly used to describe a levelling out of something that has reached its lowest point: • Industrial output is now bottoming out. It is now often used to suggest that the low point is prior to an upsurge: • The market has now bottomed out and is expected to improve by the spring.

bough or bow? The noun bough denotes a large branch of a tree: • a large bough fell on the lawn during the storm. It should not be confused with bow, which describes the front of a boat or ship or refers to bending as a sign of respect: • She greeted the duke with a bow.

Both words are pronounced [bɔʊ].

See also BOW.

bought or brought? As the past tense and past participle of the verb buy, bought is correct: • I bought [not brought] the dress in the January sales.

Brought is the past tense and past participle of the verb bring: • She brought an umbrella with her.

bouquet This word is usually pronounced [bʊˈkwɛt] or [boʊˈkwɛt], but some users prefer to stress the first syllable.

bourgeois This word, meaning 'middle class': • a bourgeois mentality, is sometimes misspelt. Note the first syllable bow and the e which softens the g in the second syllable.

The word comes from the Old French word barjois, meaning 'burgler or merchant'.

bow The word bow has two pronunciations. The noun and verb bow, referring to the bending of (part of) the body as a sign of respect, etc., are pronounced to rhyme with bow. The same pronunciation is used for the noun meaning 'front of a boat or ship'. The noun bow, meaning 'looped knot', the bow that is used as a weapon,
the bow that is used to play a violin, etc., and the verb bow, meaning 'curve', are pronounced to rhyme with toe.

In the adjective bow-legged and the noun bow window, the word bow is pronounced to rhyme with toe.

See also <i>bough</i> or <i>brow</i>?

**boy** A boy is a male child or adolescent. The use of the noun as a synonym for 'man' is largely restricted to informal contexts: • one of the boys • a local boy • the new boy • a night out with the boys.

**boycott** This word, meaning 'refuse to deal with': • boycott the Olympic games, is sometimes misspelt. Note the -tt at the end of the word.

* The term originates from the name of Charles Cunningham, Boycott (1832–97), an Irish land agent who was ostracized for refusing to grant reductions in rent.

**bracket** Some people object to the frequent use of the noun bracket in place of group, level, range, etc.: • the 25–35 age bracket • a lower income bracket.

**brackets** The most frequently used kind of brackets are round brackets, also known as parentheses. They are used to enclose supplementary or explanatory material that interrupts a complete sentence: • William James (1842–1910) was the brother of the novelist Henry James. • He asked his scout (as college servants are called in Oxford) to wake him at nine. The material in parentheses could be removed without changing the meaning or grammatical completeness of the sentence. Round brackets are used, in preference to commas or dashes, when the interruption to the sentence is quite a marked one.

* Punctuation within brackets is that appropriate to the parenthetic material, but even if it is a complete sentence, capital letters and full stops are usually not used. Punctuation of the sentence containing the brackets is unaffected, except that any punctuation which would have followed the word before the first bracket is placed after the second bracket. • Worst of all, their confidence is undermined by a lurking fear of the meaninglessness of these basic questions in themselves (is this good? is this right?), which yet they find themselves unable to cease from asking (Richard Hoggart, <i>The Uses of Literacy</i>), if the parenthetic material comes at the end of a sentence the full stop falls outside the second bracket. The only time when a full stop appears inside brackets is when the parenthetic material in brackets comes between two sentences, rather than within a sentence: • He came from a humble background. (His mother was a charwoman.) Yet he mixed with people of all classes.

Round brackets are also used for letters or numbers in a series: • The Chartists demanded (1) annual elections, (2) universal manhood suffrage, (3) equal electoral districts . . . They are also used to indicate alternatives or brief explanations: • boys (meaning 'boy' or 'boys') • it cost 15 euros (roughly £10) • the payment of VAT (value added tax).

Square brackets are used for brackets within brackets: • Browning's wife (the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning [1806–61]) was an invalid. They are also used to indicate editorial comment or explanation in quoted matter: • The Young Visitors (sic) • 'who would fardels [burdens] bear'. To use ordinary round brackets implies that the words inside them are part of the original quotation.

**brake** or **break**? These words are sometimes confused. A brake is a device to slow something down: • the handbrake on a car. Break has many meanings including 'cause to fall into pieces', 'stop', and 'transgress': • break a vase • break for lunch • break the law.

**bratpack** The noun bratpack, often spelt brattpack, is a slang term applied (especially by the media) to any group of young people, usually precociously rich and famous, noted for their rowdy or ill-mannered behaviour.

* The term, originally applied to a group of up-and-coming American film stars in the mid-1980s (modelled on the 'ratpack' of Hollywood stars including Frank Sinatra who appeared regularly in the headlines in the 1950s), should not be overused.

**bravado, bravery or bravura?** These three nouns are sometimes confused. Bravado means 'courage'; bravado is a false or outward display of courage or daring; bravura is an ostentatious or brilliant display of daring, skill, etc.

**breach** or **breach**? The word breach means 'the breaking or violating of a rule or arrangement': • a breach of the peace. Breach should not be confused with breech, 'the rear part of the body' and 'the part of a gun behind the barrel': • a breech birth.
The nouns breach and breech are pronounced [breech], but the plural noun breeches, meaning 'knee-length trousers', may be pronounced [breech] or [brich].

**bread or bred?** The word _bread_ refers to the foodstuff: a loaf of bread. _Bread_ should not be confused with _bred_, the past participle of the verb to _breed_. This species has been bred for speed.

**break see brake or breed?**

**breakthrough** Breakthrough as a metaphor meaning 'a sudden advance in (particularly scientific or technological) knowledge' has become something of a journalistic cliché. One reads, for example, of: a major breakthrough in cancer research so frequently that it has lost all impact.

**Breath** is also sometimes used to mean 'success': Olympic breakthrough for British athletes or 'new idea': The Great Barrowing Breakthrough (advertisement for a loan company).

**bred see bread or breed?**

**breech, breeches** see _breach or breech?_

**bridal or bridle?** The word _bridal_ means 'of or relating to brides or weddings': a bridal veil. _Bridal_ should not be confused with _bridle_, used as a noun meaning 'harness for a horse's head' and as a verb meaning 'restrain' or 'show resentment': The soldier slipped the bridle over the horse's head. to bridle one's tongue.

**both words are pronounced [bridal].**

**bring or take?** The verbs _bring_ and _take_ differ in meaning. _Bring_ generally denotes the fetching of something and carrying it to the speaker: Please bring me that book; _take_ generally denotes the removal of something to a more distant location: Take this rubbish with you.

**Note that brought is the correct past tense and past participle of bring and that bring is incorrect:** He brought the money with him.

**Breit** The noun _Breit_, meaning 'British person', is often used derogatorily. It should be restricted to informal contexts. A British person may be called a _Briton_, but this term is most frequently found in newspaper reports about the British abroad: A coach carrying 58 Britons... was preparing last night to spend a third night trapped in a motorway service area south of Paris (Daily Telegraph). The informal term _Britisher_ is chiefly used by people of other English-speaking nations, not by the British themselves.

**Britain** The expression _Britain_ is often used vaguely, sometimes as a substitute for _Great Britain_, sometimes for the _United Kingdom_ or the _British Isles_. As an abbreviation of _Great Britain_ it means England, Scotland, and Wales.

**The United Kingdom includes Northern Ireland as well as England, Scotland, and Wales. The British Isles includes all the United Kingdom, together with the Republic of Ireland, the Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands.**

**Briticism** British English is the basis on which the English of America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the West Indies, and the rest of the English-speaking world is built. To greater or lesser degrees the English of these countries has gone its own way, producing distinct varieties of English, while the English spoken in Britain has its own characteristics, known as **Britishisms**.

**Specifically British, usually in contrast to American, usage of grammar, spelling, and so forth, is discussed under various headings in this book. It is vocabulary and idiom that mark the speaker or writer of British English. A sentence like: I rang you from a call box but the line was engaged marks the speaker as British; in other English-speaking countries it would have been: I called you from a phone booth but the line was busy. Such familiar words or phrases as: bank holiday, fairground, white coffee, spring onion, Father Christmas, roundabout (in the senses of both merry-go-round and traffic junction) are peculiarly British uses. Of course there is no one standard form of English spoken throughout Britain; marked differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and usage are found in the different countries and regions of Britain.**

See also **DIALECT; AMERICANISMS.**

**Britisher, Briton** see _Brit_.

**Brittany** _Brittany_, the English name of a region of northwest France, is often misspelt. Note the -ts- and single -n-, unlike _Britannia_.

**broach or brooch?** A _brooch_ is a piece of jewellery that is pinned to a garment: a
brochure 44

diamond brooch. Brooch, a rare variant spelling of this noun, is most frequently used as a verb, meaning 'introduce' or 'mention': • to broach a subject. Both words are pronounced [broch].
• To broach a barrel or a bottle is to open it in order to use the contents: • We broached a second bottle of champagne.
• In nautical contexts, broach means 'to sweep dangerously in a following sea, so as to lie broadside to the waves'.

brochure This word is usually pronounced [broshər], although the French-sounding [bʁəʃœʁ] is also possible.
• Note also the ch, not zh in the spelling.

brooch see BROACH or BROOCH?
brought see BOUGHT or BROUGH?
brownie points Brownie points are national marks of approval for an action or achievement, especially something that is deliberately or ostentatiously done to win favour: • You should get some brownie points for that. • There are political brownie points in opening hospitals (The Guardian).
• The phrase may be spelt with a capital B- or with a lowercase b-. It is best restricted to informal contexts. The expression derives from the erroneous belief that Brownie Guides receive points for doing something good.

buffet In the senses 'a counter where food is served' and 'food set out on tables': • a buffet car • a buffet lunch. buffet is pronounced [buʃet]. In the sense 'strike sharply': • buffeted by the wind, the pronunciation is [bʌفت].

bulk Bulk means 'thickness, volume, or size; a heavy mass': • the cast bulk of the castle walls. It is also used in the expression in bulk to mean 'in large quantities': • We buy rice in bulk.
• Bulk is frequently used to mean 'the greater part, the majority': • The bulk of the population support the new legislation. Some people object to the application of bulk to anything other than mass or volume, but this usage is well-established and generally acceptable.

bulletin This word, meaning 'statement of news': • No further bulletin will be issued this evening, is sometimes misspelt. Note the -ll- and single t, as in bullet.

bulwark This noun, meaning 'fortification', is sometimes mispronounced. The second syllable is unstressed; the -ark ending has the same pronunciation as the -och ending of hillock.

buoy The noun and verb buoy, meaning 'type of float' or 'keep afloat', and the derived adjective buoyant, are sometimes misspelt. The most frequent mistake is to place the -u- and the -o- in the wrong order.
• Buoy should not be confused with the noun boy, which is identical in pronunciation in British English. In American English buoy is pronounced [boʊ].

bureaucracy Note the spelling of this word: the first u, the vowels eu, and the suffix -cracy (not -crazy).

burglar, rob or steal? To steal is to take other people's possessions without permission: • He stole her jewellery. Burglar is a back formation from burglar and means 'break into a building in order to steal': • Their house was burgled when they were on holiday. Burglary always involves unlawful entry. To rob is to steal money or property from a person or place, often with violence: • rob a bank • rob an old lady. Rob is sometimes incorrectly used in place of steal: • to rob a car is to take things from a car, not to take the car itself.
• The verb burglarize is chiefly confined to American English.

burned or burnt? Either word may be used as the past tense and past participle of the verb burn. In transitive contexts burned is preferred in American English and burnt in British English; in intransitive contexts burned is the preferred form in both: • We burnt/burned the letters. • He has burnt/burnt his hand. • She burnt/burnt with anger. • The fire had burnt/burnt all night.
• The fire had burnt/burnt all night.
• See also -ED or -T?

Burnt is also used as an adjective in British and American English: • burnt toast • a burnt offering.
• Burnt may be pronounced [burnt] or [bernt]; burnt is always pronounced [bernt].

bus Although the noun bus was originally short for omnibus it is now never spelt with an apostrophe.
• The word was rarely used as a verb until the 1960s, when the controversy in the United States over the practice of sending schoolchildren by bus to different districts in order to
achieve a racial balance in the schools gave rise to the need for such a verb. The problem of how to spell the various forms of the verb has not been wholly resolved. Traditional British spelling rules dictate boxed and bussing, but the American preference was for boxed and busing and these spellings have now been widely accepted in Britain.

business This noun, meaning 'occupation', 'commercial activity', or 'matter', is sometimes misspelt. The most frequent mistake is the omission of the letter -i-, which is silent in speech.

- Business is a two-syllable word, pronounced [biznis]. It should not be confused with the noun business, meaning 'the state of being busy', which has three syllables and is pronounced [bizniss].

businessman or businesswoman? see non-sexist terms.

but There are various problems with the usage of the word but. As a conjunction it is used to link two opposing ideas: • He lives in Surrey but works in London. It should not be used to link two harmonious ideas: • She is not British-born but originates from Kenya, and should not be used in a sentence with however, which conveys the same meaning:

- But their suggestions for improvement, however, were ill-received. Careful users avoid inserting a comma after but: • I agree but I have reservations. • That's a good point but not an original one.

- The problem with but used to mean 'except' is this: if functioning as a conjunction or as a preposition and should it be followed by an object or subject pronoun? Is it all but (conjunctival) or all but his (prepositional)? There is no absolute rule here but a rough guide to natural usage is to use the object when it falls at the end of a clause and the subject when it comes in the middle: • They had all escaped but her. • All but she had escaped.

The use of but at the beginning of a sentence is disliked by some users. But it is acceptable to most and can be used to good effect.

The expressions can but and cannot but are slightly formal and old-fashioned but still used:

- setting a standard others can but hope to follow (advertisement, Sunday Times). The oddity is that the expressions mean much the same thing, for the not of cannot combines with the but to form a double negative. When used with help in cannot (or can’t help) but a triple negative is formed, but in fact the expression is used positively: • I can’t help but regard your attitude as hostile. The phrase is awkward and should be avoided; the expressions can but and cannot but can also be rephrased: • I can only regard your attitude as hostile. • I can’t help regarding your attitude as hostile.

See also conjunctions: help, nothing but, not only . . . but also.

buyout A buyout is the purchase of a company, often by a group of managers:

- MFI Furniture, the independent company resulting from the management buy-out from Aida-MFI (The Guardian). • And . . . certainly in the UK . . . management buyouts are currently a very popular flavour (The Bookseller).

- The word buyout is most commonly printed or written without a hyphen.

buzz word A buzz word is a vogue word or expression, especially one that is first used in technical jargon and subsequently enters everyday language, usually in a figurative sense. Examples of buzz words that are dealt with in this dictionary are: bottom line, guaish, matrix, traumatic.

by and large or by in large? The correct rendering of this phrase, meaning 'in the main' or 'on the whole', is by and large: • We were content with the decision, by and large.

by or bye? These spellings are sometimes confused. The correct spelling of the following compounds and expressions: • by-election (occasionally, bye-election) • by-law (sometimes, bye-law) • by-pass • by-product • by and by (later) • by and large (generally) • by the by (occasionally, by the by, incidentally) • a bye in sports, and • bye-bye (informal for goodbye).

Further problems may arise from confusion with buy and bye, which are pronounced the same [bai].

by the same token By the same token is an expression meaning 'for the same reason; in a similar way': • Middle-aged men should avoid overworking because of the effects of stress on the heart; and by the same token they should avoid fatty foods. Care should be taken to avoid overusing this phrase.
cache or cash? Cache means 'secret store' or 'place where valuables are concealed': 'For years he had suspected her of keeping a secret cache of money. It should not be confused with cash, which means 'ready money' or 'money in the form of coins and banknotes': 'He paid for the car in cash.' Both words are pronounced [kaʃ].
cadre Note the pronunciation of this noun, which means 'unit or nucleus of personnel'. Of French origin, cadre is usually pronounced [kʁadʁ], rhyming with larder, in British English. The variant pronunciation [kʁadrɛ], which is closer to the French original, is less correct.
Caesarean This word, meaning 'of or relating to any of the Caesars', is used particularly in the expression Caesarean section, 'the surgical operation for the delivery of a baby by cutting through the wall of the mother's abdomen and into the womb'. The variant spellings Caesarian and, in American English, Caesarean or Cesarian, are also used. Note, too, that any of these spellings may be written with a lower-case c: 'She had a caesarean.' The word derives from Julius Caesar, who, it is traditionally thought, was born by this method.
café or cafeteria? The noun café refers to any small restaurant or coffee-bar serving nonalcoholic drinks, snacks, light meals, etc.: 'a seaside café.' The noun cafeteria is more specific, meaning 'self-service restaurant': 'There is a cafeteria on the third floor.' Note the spelling of café, particularly the acute accent, which should never be omitted. The noun may be pronounced [kaʃa] or [kaʃ].
Cafetière should not be confused with the noun cafetière, denoting a type of coffee-pot with a plunger, in which coffee can be brewed and served. The grave accent on the second -e of cafetière is optional in English.
caffeine Caffeine, pronounced [ˈkæfɪn], is a stimulant substance found in tea and coffee. Note the spelling of the word, especially the -ff- and the vowel sequence -ei-. It is an exception to the 'i' before 'e' rule (see SPELLING 5).
Caffein is a rare variant spelling of the word.
calendar, calender or colander? These words are often confused. A calendar tells the date, a calender is a machine used to smooth paper or cloth, and a colander is a perforated bowl used for draining food.
The first two words are pronounced in the same way [kælnədə]. Calender is pronounced [kælnədə] or [kælnədə]. This second pronunciation of calander is reflected in the variant spelling calulder.
callus or callous? Callus is a noun, denoting a hardened or thickened area of skin, especially on the hand or foot. The adjective callous is related to this noun, but is most frequently used in the figurative sense of 'unfeeling' or 'insensitive': 'a callous attitude to the poor.'
calorie Note the spelling of this word, which is a unit for measuring the energy value of food and also a measurement of heat.
calvary see CAVALRY or CALVARY?
cameraman or camerawoman? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.
camouflage This word, meaning 'disguise': 'The trees provided excellent camouflage, is sometimes misspelt. Note the ou and the soft g.
can or may? The verb can means 'be permitted' or 'be able'; the verb may means 'be permitted' or 'be likely'. In the sense of 'be permitted', may is preferred in formal contexts and can is best restricted to informal contexts: 'Can I come to your party? 'May I borrow your pen, please? The negative contraction can't is disliked by many people and is usually replaced with can't: 'Can't (not Mayn't) she stay?
Both verbs can be ambiguous: • He can go may mean 'he is permitted to go' or 'he is able to go'; • He may go may mean 'he is permitted to go' or 'he is likely to go'. Could and might, the past tenses of can and may respectively, are equally ambiguous: • She said he could go. • She said he might go. Could and might are also used in polite requests: • Could/Might I have another cup of tea, please?

See also BUT; CANNOT and CANT; HELP; MAY or MIGHT?

candelabra The word candelabra, meaning 'a branched candlestick or lamp', was originally a plural noun, from the singular candelabrum. Purists therefore consider it incorrect to speak of: • a valuable candelabra or to say: • There were candelabra in every room, although such usage is widespread.

Candelabra are often confused with chandeliers, which hang from the ceiling, while candelabra stand on surfaces.

cannon or canon? These two words are sometimes confused. A cannon is a large gun and a shot in billiards, a canon, with a single n, is a ruling laid down by the church, or a tute given to a clergyman.

Both words are pronounced [кан̬а̃н].

cannot and can't In American English can not is sometimes written as two words but in British English cannot is standard. It may be necessary to write can not when the not is stressed: • No, I can not lend you any more money, or in sentences like: • It can not only blend vegetables but also grind coffee beans, where the not goes with only, rather than can.

• Care should be taken when using cannot in constructions like: • Her work cannot be too highly praised. • You cannot put too much pepper in, where ambiguity can arise. Was her work excellent or poor? Should a large or small amount of pepper be put in?

The contraction can't is normally used in speech and often in writing. The standard British English pronunciation is [кант].

See also BUT; CAN or MAY?; HELP.

canon see CANNON or CANON?

can't see CANNOT and CANT.

canvas or canvass? Canvas is a certain type of woven cloth: • a canvas bag • a painting on canvas. Canvas, with -ss at the end, means 'solicit votes': • He canvassed for the Labour Party.

cap The suffix -cap relates to restrictions imposed by central government on local council spending and taxation. Under the system of domestic rates, councils could be rate-capped; the introduction of the community charge (or poll tax) led to such terms as charge-capping. The verb is sometimes used independently: • The government threatened to cap a number of councils.

capability, capacity or ability? These words all refer to the power to do something. Capability suggests having the qualities needed to do something: • She has the capability to handle the work. Capacity suggests being able to absorb or receive: • Children are born with the capacity to acquire language. Ability can sometimes suggest above-average skills: • He has considerable mathematical ability.

• Capacity has several other meanings: 'volume'; • The pot has a capacity of two litres, '(maximum) output'; • The factory is working at (full) capacity, 'particular role'; • I am speaking in my capacity as treasurer. It is also used as an adjective in the journalistic phrase: • a capacity crowd at the ground.

capital or capitol? Capital denotes the seat of government of a country or state: • Tokyo is the capital of Japan. Capitol refers to the building housing a state legislature, often specifically to the headquarters of the US Congress: • The party's control of the Capitol is no longer in question.

capital letters Capital letters are used to draw attention to a particular word. There are some generally accepted rules for their use, but some areas where it is a matter of choice.

• Capitals are used to mark the first word of a sentence, a direct quotation, or a direct question within a sentence (see also QUESTION MARKS; QUOTATION MARKS; SENTENCES). They are sometimes used after a colon (see COLON). They are used for the first word of each line of poetry: • Forewarned of madness/in three days time at dusk! The fit masters him (Robert Graves), and for the major words of titles of literary, musical, or artistic works: • The Mill on the Floss; Peter and the Wolf.

Capitals are used for proper nouns and most adjectives derived from them: • John Brown • New York • Sainsbury's • Oxford Street • French • Jewish • Freudian. If an adjective is not closely connected with its original proper noun it does not usually
take a capital: *brussels sprouts* • *french windows*,
and capitals are not used for verbs derived from 
proper nouns: • *anglicize* • *boycott* (see also
**EPONYMS; TRADE NAMES**). Titles of people or 
places are capitalized when part of a proper name
but not when used alone: • *my aunt* • *Aunt Jane* •
redbrick universities • *Cambridge University* • a
professor of history • *Professor Thomson*. For
institutions the rule is that capitals are used in
specific references but not in general ones: • many
world governments • the Government has agreed
• he goes to a Baptist church • *St Mark’s Church* •
the Church of England. The pronoun *I* always takes
a capital, but no other pronouns apart from those
referring to God, where some people choose to
capitalize He, Him, His.

Capitals are used for days of the week, months,
holidays, and religious holidays: • *Monday* •
*February* • *Easter* • *Yom Kippur*, but not for
seasons. They are used for historical, cultural,
and geological periods: • *the Restoration* • *the
Enlightenment* • *the Spanish Civil War* • *the Stone
Age*.

Capitals should never be used for emphasis;
italics should be used for this purpose: • an
enormous [not ENORMOUS] beat!

In recent years the conventions relating to capi-
tals have been considerably relaxed in the context
of electronic communications, simply because it is
quicker and easier to type lower-case characters
than upper-case ones. It is usually not necessary to
distinguish between capital and lower-case letters
in e-mail addresses and Internet searches, and
computer users have accordingly fallen into the
habit of using lower-case letters to open sentences,
write names, etc.: • *joe didn’t get my message about
the new york trip*. The same tendency has been
observed in other contexts, such as company
names, in conscious imitation of the abbreviated,
simplified writing styles associated with modern
electronic communications.

See also **ABBREVIATIONS; COLON; EAST, EAST
or EASTERN?; E-MAIL; HYphen; NORTH, NORTH
or NORTHERN?; SOUTH, SOUTH or SOUTHERN?;
WEST, WEST or WESTERN?**

carat or *care*? These words are some-
times confused. *Caret* is a unit for meas-
uring the weight of precious stones and a
unit for measuring the purity of gold; in
this second sense, the spelling *carat* is
usually used in American English. A *caret,*
spelt with an e, is a character used in
written or printed matter to indicate that
an insertion should be made.

**carburettor** Note the spelling of this word,
particularly the -*re*-, the -*rr*-, and the -*oo-
ending.

• The spelling in American English is *carburetor*.

carcass This word, which describes the
body of a dead animal: • *a chicken carcass*,
may be spelt *carcase* or *carcase* in British
English.

• In American English only carcass is used.

care The verb *care* is followed by the
preposition for or about in the sense ‘feel
affection’: • *Most people care for [or about]
their family*, and for in the sense ‘like’: • *I
don’t care for foreign food*. In the sense ‘look
after’ it is followed by for: • *He cared for the
wounded fox*, and in the sense ‘be con-
cerned’ it is followed by about: • *She doesn’t
care about the cost*.

• Some people avoid using the phrase *in care* to
describe a person whose welfare is the responsi-
bility of the social services, believing this carries a
stigma: • *Both children have been in care since the
arrest of their parents*. They may, however, be
equally reluctant to use such suggested alterna-
tives as the voguish looked-after: • *You will chair
child protection case conferences and reviews of
Looked After Children . . .* (The Guardian, job
advertisement).

caret see *carat* or *care*?

Caribbean This word, referring to the
region extending from the southeastern
tip of Florida to the northern coast of South
America, is often misspelt. Note the single
-*r*- and the -*bb*- in the middle of the word.

• Caribbean is pronounced [kərˈbiːən] in British
English and [kərˈbiːən] in American English.

caring Caring has been used in recent years
in such phrases as: • *the caring professions* •
*the caring services*, to describe people pro-
essionally involved in various kinds of social
work, sometimes also including health care and
education.

• It combines the idea of ‘taking care of’ and the
idea of ‘concerned’: • *The welfare state itself, and
all the caring professions, seemed to be plunging
into . . . uncertainty, self-questioning, economic
crisis* (Margaret Drabble, *The Middle Ground*).

The noun carer is used to denote a person who
looks after a sick or old relative: • *The new benefit
is payable to carers and their dependants*.

carpal or *carpel*? Carpal refers to a bone in
the wrist: • *The x-ray revealed an abnormality
in the carpal. • carpal-tunnel syndrome. It
should not be confused with carpel, which
refers to the female reproductive organ in a
flower: • Those blooms are notable for their
prominent carpels and colourful petals.
* Both words are pronounced [ka·ri·pəl].
carte blanche The French phrase carte
blanche means ‘complete freedom or
authority to do whatever one thinks is
right’ • He was given carte blanche to do
what he wanted.
* The literal French meaning of carte blanche is
‘blank document’.
case Case is very often loosely used to mean
‘state of affairs, the truth’ in sentences
where it is either redundant or could be
replaced by simpler or more specific word-
ing: • Is it the case that you are his aunt?
could be changed to: Are you his aunt? •
Teenage pregnancies are now less common
than was the case ten years ago could be
changed to: . . . than they were ten years ago.
The expression is acceptable in sentences
like: • This rule applies in your case.
* In case is used as a conjunction: • In case it rains.
The use of just in case, with no clause: • Take your
mac, just in case is acceptable only in informal
contexts.
cash see cache or cash?
caster or castor? For the senses ‘a swivel-
ing wheel on furniture’ and ‘a container
from which sugar may be shaken’, the
spelling may be either castor or caster.
Finely granulated white sugar is usually
caster sugar, although the spelling castor
sugar is also found. The medicinal or
lubricating oil, castor oil, is, however, always
spelt with an o.
catalyst A catalyst is a scientific term that
applies to a substance which speeds up a
chemical reaction though itself remaining
chemically unchanged. It is also used as a
metaphor to apply to a person or event that,
by its action, provokes significant change: •
The shooting of Archduke Ferdinand acted as
the catalyst for the outbreak of World War I.
Overuse of the word catalyst is disliked by
some.
catarrh This word, which describes an
inflammation of the throat and nasal pas-
sages, is sometimes misspelt. Note particu-
larly the single t and the rh.
catastrophic The adjective catastrophic
comes from catastrophe which was origi-
nally used in Greek drama to describe the
denouement of a tragedy. The word should
be applied to extremely severe disasters and
tragic events: • the catastrophic earthquake in
Mexico City.
* It is often used informally for quite minor dis-
asters: • Do you remember that catastrophic dinner
party when I burnt the casserole?
catch-22 In Joseph Heller’s novel Catch
22, published in 1961, the catch in question
was that airmen could be excused from
flying missions only if they were of un-
sound mind, but a request to be excused
from flying missions was a sign of a con-
cern for personal safety in the face of
danger and therefore evidence of a
rational mind, so it was impossible to
escape flying missions. A catch-22 situation
is any such circular dilemma or predic-
ament from which there is no escape, and is
often extended to any situation or problem
where the victim feels that it is impossible
to gain a personal benefit or make the
right decision.
cater The verb cater is followed by the
preposition to or for: • The leisure centre
caters to [for] the needs of the local people.
Catholic or catholic? The word catholic,
with a lower-case c-, is an adjective mean-
ging ‘general, wide-ranging, or comprehen-
sive’: • It is a catholic anthology which
includes poems by Shelley, Auden, and Allen
Ginsberg. Catholic, with a capital, as a noun
or adjective, usually refers to the Roman
Catholic Church: • He’s a good Catholic. •
They go to a Catholic school.
* As some ‘high’ Anglicans prefer to refer to
themselves as Catholics, it is advisable to use
the term Roman Catholic when speaking in a
specifically theological context.
cavalry or Calvary? These words are
sometimes confused. Cavalry is used to
refer to soldiers trained to fight on horse-
back and the branch of the army that uses
armoured vehicles. Calvary is the hill near
Jerusalem where Christ was crucified.
caviar or caviare? Both of these spellings
are acceptable for the word which describes
the salted roe of the sturgeon.
CE see AD and BC.
cede or seed? These two verbs, which are pronounced the same, should not be confused. Cede means 'surrender' or 'give way to': • The defending champion ceded the match. • The President ceded the point. It should not be confused with seed, which means 'scatter seed in', 'initiate', or 'rank a sportsperson as a seed': • The farmer seeded the field. • This money will help to seed economic recovery. • seeded tennis players.

celling Ceiling is frequently used, particularly in economic jargon, to mean 'an upper limit': • The organisation is urging the Government to put a ceiling on rent rises. As the word ceiling, in its literal meaning, is in constant use, it can sound odd to speak of increasing or reducing a ceiling, an unworkable ceiling, and so on: • Sir Gordon Borrie ... said, 'If money and manpower ceilings were to become too tight in relation to the demands put upon my office, then the taxpayer ... would be likely to pay the price in other ways' (The Guardian).

celeb This abbreviated form of celebrity has been heard with increasing frequency since the 1990s but remains essentially a slang term and should be avoided in formal contexts: • The usual pose of celebs turned up for his birthday bash. • She’s a bit of a celeb around here.

celibate Celibacy means 'the state of being unmarried, often because of a religious vow'. Celibate is used as a noun to describe a person living in a state of celibacy and, by implication, chaste: • As celibates, priests find it difficult to give advice on marital problems, and as an adjective: • She never married but chose a celibate life.

• The word is sometimes used to mean 'abstaining from sexual intercourse': • After twenty years of marriage, they decided to live a celibate life together. Careful users consider this usage to be incorrect.

Celsius, centigrade or Fahrenheit? All these terms denote scales of temperature. The Celsius and centigrade scales are the same; the degree Celsius is now the principal unit of temperature in both scientific and nonscientific contexts.

• The Fahrenheit scale, on which water freezes at 32 and boils at 212, remains in informal use, particularly with reference to the weather: • The temperature reached the eighties today. The centigrade scale, on which water freezes at 0 and boils at 100, is now known as the Celsius scale, to avoid confusion with other units of measurement.

Celsius and Fahrenheit should always begin with a capital letter, being the surnames of the scientists who devised the scales.

Celtic The word Celtic, referring to a language or people of Scotland, Wales, Ireland, or Brittany, is usually pronounced [keltik], with a hard initial C-.

• The variant pronunciation [seltik], with a soft initial C, is most frequently associated with the Scottish football team of that name.

censure, censor or censuer? The verbs censure and censor are often confused. Censure means 'blame, criticize strongly, or condemn': • The judge censured them for the brutality of the attack. Censor means 'examine letters, publications, films, etc., and remove any material which is considered obscene, libellous, or contrary to government or official policy': • All prisoners' mail is censored. The person who examines letters, etc., in this way is also known as a censor.

• The adjective from censor is censorial and from censure, censurous.

Censor should not be confused with the noun censer, meaning 'a vessel used for burning incense'.

centenary or centennial? Both centenary and centennial are used to mean a hundred-year anniversary: • 1982 was the centenary of Joyce’s birth. Centennial is used more frequently in American English and can also be used as an adjective: • a centennial celebration.

• The recommended pronunciation of centenary is [senteneəri], although some people pronounce it [sentenæri]. Centennial is pronounced [sentenæli].

centigrade see CELSIUS, CENTIGRADE OR FAHRENHEIT?
centre or middle? Centre and middle are sometimes used virtually synonymously: • Put it in the centre/middle of the table. Centre is used as a precise geometrical term: • the centre of the circle, whereas middle is more often used generally in situations where the geometrical centre is not obvious or measurable: • the middle of the sea.

• Centre is also used to mean a place where activity is concentrated: • shopping centre, middle
is used to mean the point equally distant from extremes, either literally: • middle name, or figuratively: • middle-of-the-road politics.

centre on or centre around? The verb centre can be used with on or upon or (of a place) at: • His argument centres on Marxist theory. • The European Parliament is centred at Brussels.

◆ The expressions centre round and centre around: • The film centres around the Vietnam War. • Her hobbies centred around the arts are frequently used, although they are disliked by many careful users as being illogical, because, it is argued, a centre cannot be around anything.

Since this usage is so widely objected to, it is best avoided. One alternative is to use the more acceptable revolve around instead: • Everything revolves around the children in this house.

centrifugal There are two pronunciations for this word. The traditional pronunciation stresses the second syllable [sentrifyoo-gəl], but the alternative pronunciation [sentrifyoo-gəl] is widely used in contemporary English.

centuries People often become confused about when centuries start and end and how one should refer to them. As there was no year AD 0, we calculate in hundred years from the year AD 1. This means that the twentieth century ended on 31 December 2000 and the twenty-first century began on 1 January 2001.

◆ Despite the reckoning above, 31 December 1999 was popularly accepted as marking the end of the twentieth century and 1 January 2000 the beginning of the twenty-first century.

See also MILLENNIUM.

cereal or serial? These two words are sometimes confused. A cereal is a plant that produces grain for food: • breakfast cereals. A serial is a novel or play produced in several parts and at regular intervals: • a television serial.

ceremonial or ceremonious? The adjectives ceremonial and ceremonious are sometimes confused. Ceremonial means 'marked by ceremony or ritual': • The Queen wears her crown only on ceremonial occasions like the opening of Parliament. Ceremonious means 'devoted to formality and ceremony' and usually carries a slightly pejorative suggestion of overpunctiliousness or pomp-osity: • She presided over the dinner table with a ceremonious air.

certainty or certitude? Both these nouns mean 'the state of being certain'. Certainty is by far the more frequent, and is used in a wider range of contexts: • a feeling of certainty • the certainty of death. Certitude is a formal or literary word, largely restricted to the state of mind of somebody who is certain: • Nothing could disturb his certitude.

◆ Certitude may also be used as a countable noun: • She may win, but it's not a certainty. Certitude is not used in this sense.

cervical There are two pronunciations for this word, both of which are perfectly acceptable: [sərˈvɪkəl] and [sərˈvɪkəl].

cession or cessation? These two nouns should not be confused. Cession is derived from the verb cede, meaning 'yield'; cessation is derived from the verb cease, meaning 'stop': • the cession of territory • the cessation of warfare.

◆ Both words are largely restricted to formal contexts.

See also CESSION or SESSION.

cession or session? Cession is the act of yielding (see CESSION or CESSTATION); a session is a meeting or a period of time devoted to a specific activity: • the cession of rights/property • a parliamentary session • a recording session • The court is in session.

◆ The two nouns are identical in pronunciation and should not be misused; session is the more frequent in usage.

cf. or ff.? The abbreviation cf. (from Latin confer) means 'compare': • cf. table on page 47. The abbreviation ff. stands for folios following and means 'see subsequent pages or lines': • For more details, see page 172 ff.

chafe or chaff? The verb chafe means 'rub'; the old-fashioned verb chaff means 'tease': • These boots chafe my ankles. • She was chaffed by her colleagues. The two verbs should not be confused.

◆ Chaff is also a noun, meaning 'husks of wheat, etc.', and is used figuratively in the phrase to separate the wheat from the chaff, meaning 'separate the good from the bad'.

chain reaction Chain reaction is an expression from scientific terminology that refers
to a chemical or nuclear reaction which creates energy or products that cause further reaction. It is now more often used to mean any series of events where each one sets off the next one, though this usage is disliked by some: • The shooting started a chain reaction which culminated in the street riots.

**chair** The noun chair is sometimes used to denote a person presiding over a meeting, committee, etc., to avoid the potentially sexist terms chairman and chairwoman and the controversial neologism chairperson: • The new chair will be elected next week.

• This usage is disliked by some people.

See also NON-SEXIST TERMS; PERSON.

The verb chair, meaning 'preside over', is acceptable to most users: • The leader of the Union chaired the conference.

**challenge** Some people object to the frequent use of the word challenge in the sense of 'stimulate' or, as a noun, 'something that is stimulating or demanding': • Gifted children need challenging work. • The job presents a challenge.

• The verb challenge sometimes means little more than 'interest; excite': • The film challenged us visually and musically.

**challenged** Challenged is a vogue word used to form euphemisms for disability or disadvantage: • physically challenged.

See also ABLED; POLITICAL CORRECTNESS.

• The use of this term is widely satirized by opponents of political correctness, who have coined such phrases as fallically challenged, "bailing". It is often used facetiously or ironically:

• Robert Lindsay ... is about to play the nally challenged Cyrano de Bergerac in the West End (Daily Telegraph). • The Borrowers are a vertically challenged family – 6in tall, to be exact (Sunday Times). • Financially-challenged souls cannot afford to cast aside the clothes that have been key fashion investments over the past three years (Daily Telegraph). • The usual assumption made about those still watching the TV of their youth – that they're sad, socially challenged creatures (Sunday Times).

**chamois** This word may cause problems with pronunciation and spelling. The antelope chamois is pronounced [ʃəməs]. The leather chamois made from the skin of this animal or a sheep is usually pronounced [ʃaˈmiːs].

**changeable** This word, meaning 'liable to change': • changeable weather, is sometimes misspelt. Note the e of change which is retained before the suffix -able.

See also SPELLING 3.

**chaperon** or **chaperone**? An older woman who accompanies a young unmarried woman on social occasions is known as a chaperon or a chaperone. The noun, and its derived verb, may be spelt with or without the final e.

• The usual pronunciation for both spellings is [ʃeəˈpɔːn].

**character** The word character can be used of the distinguishing qualities that make up individual people or things, of people with unusual traits, of people portrayed in works of fiction, and of moral firmness and integrity: • Such behaviour did not seem consistent with what I know of her character. • It is a lively town with a great deal of character.

• Everyone knows him – he's a real character.

• Mrs Gamp is a minor character in Martin Chuzzlewit. • Anyone who takes this job on will need character and determination.

• Character is often used vaguely in such phrases as: • the strange character of this declaration • programmes of an intellectual character • the intimate character of our conversation, Where it is used to mean no more than 'type' or 'quality', character would be better replaced.

**charisma** The word charisma was originally used only in theological contexts to refer to supernatural spiritual gifts of healing, speaking in tongues, etc. A charismatic church is one where emphasis is placed on the exercise of these gifts. Charisma and charismatic are now often used to describe a person with unusual qualities of leadership, personal appeal, and magnetism, though care should be taken to avoid overusing these words: • Lange is planning to run a presidential-style election campaign, based on his own charisma (Sunday Times).

• The word charismatic is sometimes used more loosely to mean 'charming or showing a confident efficiency'. • Our client . . . is looking for two charismatic sales managers (advertisement, Daily Telegraph).

**charted** or **chartered**? A chartered accountant/surveyor/engineer/etc. is a person who has the required professional qualifications and experience. A chartered yacht is a hired
yacht. Chartered should not be confused with charted (derived from the word chart): ♦ charted territory.

♦ Similarly, the adjective uncharted, describing something that has not been mapped or surveyed: ♦ uncharted waters, should not be misspelt as unchartered.

chat The verb chat is followed by to or with: ♦ chatting to [or with] his friend on the telephone.

♦ The advent of chat rooms on the internet, enabling people to communicate directly with others via a computer network, has brought a whole new linguistic dimension to chat, with participants adopting a radically abbreviated style of writing that makes much use of coded phrases and symbols: ♦ got to go fly! :-) (meaning 'got to go, talk to you later', followed by a symbol indicating happiness).

See also E-MAIL; SMILEY; TEXT MESSAGING.

chattering classes The chattering classes are educated middle- and upper-class liberals who frequently air their opinions in the media: ♦ [Rupert] Murdoch is contemptuous of the views of those to whom he and . . . Andrew Neil obsessively refer as the 'chattering classes' (The Bookbuyer). This vogue term is generally used in a derogatory manner.

chauvinism The word chauvinism means 'excessive or fanatical patriotism' and comes from Nicolas Chauvin, a soldier of Napoleon's army who was noted for his overzealous patriotism. It is used more loosely to describe any prejudiced belief in the superiority of a group or cause, particularly in the term male chauvinism:

♦ The media . . . fanned the flames of male chauvinism, stereotyping all women who took a serious interest in the issue as bra-burners (Elaine Storkey, What's Right with Feminism).

♦ Some people, encountering the word for the first time in the context of male chauvinism, wrongly assume chauvinist to be synonymous with sexist: ♦ Her husband's an awful chauvinist. The term should not be used in this sense unless preceded by male.

cheat The verb cheat is followed by the preposition of or out of: ♦ She had been cheated of [or out of] her inheritance. To cheat on one's husband or wife is to be unfaithful to them.

cheque or check? A cheque is an order to a bank to pay money from a person's account. Check is the spelling preferred in American English, but is never preferred to cheque in British English.

♦ Both spellings are pronounced [chek].

chequered Note the spelling of this adjective, meaning 'varied; marked by many changes in fortune', most frequently used in such phrases as a chequered career and chequered past. In British English the adjective is spelt chequered; chequered is the American English spelling.

chiarosuro This word, meaning 'light and shade' (usually in reference to drawings and paintings), is often mispronounced. The correct pronunciation is [kiərəsˈɵrəʊ].

chick or chicken? A chick is a young bird: ♦ The chicks have hatched. ♦ eagle chick. A chicken is a type of domestic fowl and chicken is the meat of this fowl: ♦ He keeps geese and chickens. ♦ roast chicken. Either noun may be applied to the young of a domestic fowl: ♦ a hen and her chicks [or chickens].

♦ Chick is also used offensively as a slang term for a young woman. This is now dated, although the derivatives chick flick and chick lit, respectively denoting a film and book aimed at a female audience, are relatively recent coinages: ♦ It's a romantic chick flick that won't appeal to many men. These phrases are considered derogatory by some women.

chihuahua Note the unusual spelling of this word, which denotes a breed of tiny dog. These dogs are named after the state of Chihuahua in Mexico; the noun is sometimes written with a capital C-.

♦ Chihuahua is usually pronounced [chiwahwah] or [chiwahwa].

chilblain A sore that is caused by exposure to the cold is known as a chilblain. The word is sometimes misspelt, the most common error being to retain the second l of chill which has been lost in the formation of this compound noun.

childish or childlike? Childish is almost always used in a pejorative sense to indicate immaturity and the less endearing characteristics of childhood: ♦ She refused to tolerate his selfish behaviour and childish
outbreaks of temper. • The drawings looked like childish scribbles. Childlike is usually applied to the attractive qualities of childhood, such as enthusiasm and innocence: • At 83, she retains a childlike curiosity about her environment.

chill This word, meaning 'relax' or 'take time out', is a vogue term of 1990s origin, probably coined in imitation of cool: • I plan to stay at home tonight, just chilling. It is best restricted to informal contexts.

• It is often encountered in the form chill out, in which case it may also mean 'calm down': • Everyone needs to chill out occasionally. • Stop yelling at me and chill out. A chillout room is a quiet, restful place in a club where dancers may relax.

Chinese Chinese as an adjective means 'of or from China': • Chinese writing; it is also used as a singular or plural noun for a person or people of Chinese nationality: • I took a party of Chinese around London. • There is a Chinese studying at my college.

• The singular expression a Chinese sounds odd to some people, who prefer to say a Chinese man/ woman. The term Chinesean is out-of-date, derogatory, and offensive.

chiroprast This word, describing a person who treats and looks after people's feet, may be pronounced [kirop'&st] or [k&rohop'&st], although the first of these is preferred by many users.

cholesterol This word is sometimes misspelt. The most frequent error is the omission of the second e, often silent in speech.

• Remember also that the first syllable is ch- and not che- as in chlorine.

chord or cord? These spellings are sometimes confused. In the musical or mathematical senses the spelling is chord. Chord is also used when describing an emotional reaction: • He struck the right chord. In the anatomical sense: • umbilical chord • spinal cord, either spelling is acceptable, although in vocal cords the word is nearly always spelt without an h. The word which describes any type of string is spelt cord: • nylon cord.

Christian name see FIRST NAME, CHRISTIAN NAME, FORENAME, GIVEN NAME or BAPTISMAL NAME?

chronic Chronic means 'long-standing; permanently present': • She has suffered from chronic asthma all her life. • Malnutrition is a chronic problem in the Third World.

• It is often confused, in its medical context, with acute, which means 'intense and of sudden onset': • I suddenly got an acute [not chronic] pain in my shoulder. Because chronic is so often used of pains and illnesses that are very bad it is also sometimes used in informal British English to mean 'bad' or 'dreadful': • Drank! My word! Something chronic' (Shaw, Pygmalion).

chute or shoot? Chute means 'slide' or 'slops' and is also an abbreviated form of 'parachute': • Three sacks of grain came down the chute. • He opened the chute as soon as he left the plane. Shoot means 'to fire a weapon', 'to travel quickly', etc.: • He shot several times at his enemy. • The dog shot out of the pipe.

• Both words are pronounced [shoot].

chutzpah Chutzpah or chutzpa is a Yiddish expression now in general use which, in one word, conveys 'check, gall, effrontery, audacity, cool nerve, brazen self-confidence, arrogance'.

• In The Joys of Yiddish, Leo Rosten writes 'Chutzpa is that quality enshrined in a man who, having killed his mother and father, throws himself on the mercy of the court because he is an orphan.'

It is pronounced [khhuutspə].

circumstances In the circumstances and under the circumstances are used in slightly different ways. In the circumstances is more general, and merely acknowledges the existence of a situation: • In the circumstances you had better do nothing. Under the circumstances suggests more of a connection between the circumstances and the action: • He was starving and under the circumstances cannot be blamed for stealing food.

• Under is more often used than in in a negative context: • Under no circumstances will I allow it.

cirrhosis This word, denoting a disease of the liver, is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the -rh- combination.

cite, site, or sight? These words may occasionally be confused since they are all pronounced in the same way [sait]. Cite means 'to give something as an example', 'to order', or 'to praise': • The prisoner cited several cases in his defence. • The two men...
were cited for their bravery. Site means 'to locate something'; • The memorial will be sited in that corner. Sight means 'to see someone or something'; • They sighted a ship on the far horizon.

city or town? In general a city is a place that is larger and more important than a town: • She had only lived in small towns before and was apprehensive about moving to the city.

• The British 'rule' that the possession of a cathedral confers city status on a town is misleading, it is the monarch who grants a town the right to call itself a city, and though cities very often do have cathedrals this is not always the case. Cambridge, for example, was granted city status and has no cathedral.

civic, civil or civilian? These words all refer to citizenship but have different meanings. Civic means 'of a city'; • civic centre, or is used of the attitudes of citizens to their city: • a sense of civic pride. Civil relates to citizens of a state, rather than a city: • civil rights, or is used as distinct from criminal, religious, or military: • civil law • civil marriage • civil defence. Civilian refers to a person who is not a member of the armed forces, police, or other official uniformed state organization: • The mayor had been a bank manager in civilian life.

• Civil is also used to mean 'polite or courteous': • The proprietor was very civil to us.

clad or clothed? Clad means the same as clothed but, except in expressions like thinly clad or ill-clad, is considered archaic or poetic. It can be used of things other than clothes: • rose-clad trellises, or of clothes where the note of archaism is appropriate: • clad in armour, but for ordinary dress, clothed is used: • She was clothed completely in black.

• Clothed, not clad, may be used as the opposite of naked: • With that punch, he looks severer clothed these days.

claim The verb claim means 'demand something as a right': • The dismissed workers are claiming redundancy pay; 'take something one rightfully owns or that is one's due': • He claimed his father's estate. • She claimed the prize, and 'assert forcefully, especially when faced with possible contradiction': • He claims that there have been no composers of genius since Beethoven.

• This last use was at one time disliked, having no connection with the recognition of rights, but it is now widely used and accepted. It should, however, be avoided when the assertion is not particularly forceful or controversial, when maintain, allege, contend, or sometimes just say, is often better.

clandestine This word, meaning 'secret', is generally stressed on the second syllable [kləˈdeɪntɪ], although it is acceptable to stress the word on the first syllable [kləˈdeɪnt].

classic or classical? There is some overlap in the meanings of classic and classical, but they have distinct separate meanings. Classic means 'typical of or unusually fine in its class': • classic symptoms of diabetes • a classic example of 1960s pop art. Classical essentially means 'of the classics, i.e. the literature, history, and philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome': • a classical education.

• Classic is also used to mean 'elegant and unlikely to date': • a classic dress • classic design, and 'definitive, absolute': • Your behaviour was a dirty trick of classic dimensions . . . (The Guardian).

While the classics are the works of ancient Greece and Rome, a classic is any work of high standard and enduring quality, whatever its date: • the jazz classic 'St Louis Blues'.

Classical, too, can suggest elegance, but there is a definite link with the standards and forms of ancient Greece and Rome. Classical music, in its narrowest sense, is the music of about 1750–1830, which is characterized by its formal beauty. The term is, however, widely applied to all serious music, as distinct from jazz, folk, and popular music.

clause A clause is a group of words, including a finite verb, within a compound or complex sentence. A main clause can stand alone as a sentence in its own right; it is expanded by a subordinate clause. A relative clause modifies the subject or object of a sentence.

• in the sentence • She stayed at home because it was raining. She stayed at home is the main clause and because it was raining is the subordinate clause. The sentence • She stayed at home but her sister went out contains two main clauses.

Relative clauses may be defining (identifying) or non-defining (non-identifying). They are usually introduced by that, which, who, etc. A defining clause provides essential information; a
claustraphobia

The fear of being in confined spaces is known as claustraphobia. Note the claustr- in the spelling.

clean or cleanse\(^1\) While clean functions as adjective, noun, adverb, and verb, cleanse is used only as a verb. The two words are almost synonymous but cleanse has more of a suggestion of very thorough cleaning which also purifies: • I’ll just clean the flat quickly. • The wound must be cleansed before a dressing is applied.

● Cleanse has a more formal sound than clean and is sometimes used figuratively to mean 'purify', as it is in the older translations of the Bible: • Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin (Psalm 51:2).

cleft lip Cleft lip, referring to a congenital split in the upper lip, is preferred to the former term harelip, which is now considered offensive and should be avoided.

clench or clench\(^2\) These two words are sometimes confused. The verb clench means 'close tightly' or 'grasp firmly': • to clench one's teeth • She clenched the key in her hand. The verb clench is most frequently used in the figurative sense of 'settle definitely': • to clench a deal.

● The literal meaning of the verb clench is 'secure by bending over the protruding point of a driven nail'. Clinch is also used as a noun and verb to refer to two people holding each other tightly with the arms in boxing or wrestling or in an amorous embrace.

clergyman or clergywoman\(^3\) see non-sexist terms.

clever The adjective clever is followed by the preposition at in the sense 'clever at a subject, an activity, etc.': • He's not very clever at maths, and by with in the sense 'clever with a tool, one's hands, etc.': • She's clever with a needle.

clichés The word cliché, referring to a phrase or idiom that has become stale through overuse, is almost always used pejoratively. Examples of clichés are: • from time immemorial • as old as the hills • last but not least.

● Not all fixed phrases are necessarily bad. Some clichés were quite apt when first used but have become hackneyed over the years. One can hardly avoid using the occasional cliché, but clichés that are inefficient in conveying their meaning or are inappropriate to the occasion should be avoided.

There are various categories of cliché. There are overworked metaphors and similes: • leave no stone unturned • as good as gold, overused idioms: • to add insult to injury • a blessing in disguise, the clichés of public speakers: • someone who needs no introduction • in no uncertain terms • without fear or favour, and the quotation (or usually misquotation) from the Bible or Shakespeare: • pride goes before a fall • a poor thing, but mine own. Journalists are perhaps the worst offenders. To them all countries at war are strife-torn, all battles are pitched, and all denials categorical.

Many clichés have become such through many years of use. But it can take a very short time for a newly-coined phrase to become a cliché. Some modern examples are: • sixty-four thousand dollar question • at the end of the day • at this moment in time • keep a low profile • a level playing field • a game of two halves.

client or customer? A client is someone who receives the services of a professional person or organization, while a customer is someone who buys goods from a shop or other trading organization: • The solicitor had several showbusiness clients. • She was a regular customer at the fish market.

● A collective noun for regular clients is clientele, and this word is also sometimes used for customers, particularly if there is a suggestion of superiority in the shop or its customers: • The customers at the Co-op have less exacting tastes than the clientele of Harrods. The rather formal word patron is also sometimes used in place of customer, when they are regarded as bestowing the favour of their custom on an establishment.

clientele The preferred pronunciation of this word, which means 'clients' (see client or customer?): • an exclusive clientele, is [kleontel]. Note also the spelling, particularly the -ele (not -elle) ending.
climactic or climatic? These two words have completely different meanings. Climacitic is the adjective from climax: • This aria marks the climactic point of the opera. Climatic is the adjective from climate: • The climatic conditions are unsuitable for outdoor activities.

* Both words should be distinguished from the noun climactic, which means 'a crucial stage in life; the menopause or corresponding male equivalent'.

climatic The word climate has been extended in meaning to embrace not just the atmosphere as regards the weather, but atmosphere in general: • a climate of hope. It is used rather more specifically of the prevailing state of affairs or the attitudes and opinions of people at a particular time: • the economic climate • the change in the moral climate of America (Franklin D. Roosevelt).

climatic see climactic or climatic?

clinch see clench or clinch?

clique The noun clique, often used pejoratively to denote a small exclusive group of people, may be pronounced to rhyme with task or tick.

* The first of these pronunciations, [klık], is closer to the French original and is preferred by many users.

close Close is a word taken from genetic science, where it means 'the sexually, and often artificially, produced offspring of a parent, which is genetically identical to the parent, or a group of such offspring, which are genetically identical to each other'. Despite the dislike of some people, the word is now used popularly to suggest anything very similar to something else: • Marketing the Arts is a new magazine, tabloid size, a close of Campaign (Daily Telegraph). It is also used synonymously with lookalike: • a dozen Elvis Presley clones.

close or closed? Confusion between these two words sometimes arises when they are used in compounds, especially close/closed season (the period of time when the killing of certain animals, birds, or fish is forbidden). In British English close season is preferred; in American English, closed season.

* in most other compounds close and closed are not interchangeable: • a close shave • a closed-shop agreement • at close quarters • closed-circuit television.

in all these compounds close is pronounced [klós] and closed is pronounced [klós].

close proximity Proximity means 'being close or near in space or time': • Its proximity to the station made the house particularly convenient. As 'close' is part of the meaning of the word, it is never necessary to add close before proximity: • His close proximity made me feel uneasy.

See also Tautology.

clothed see clad or clothed?

cloak Some people object to the overuse of the noun cloak to mean 'influence; political power': • financial cloak • The union doesn't carry much clout with the government. This usage is best restricted to informal contexts.

cloak The prefix co- is increasingly attached without a hyphen in modern usage. Some users prefer to retain the hyphen when the prefix is attached to a word beginning with o-: • co-ordinate • co-operate (see also Hyphen). Some dictionaries retain the hyphen in words referring to a person who does something jointly with another: • co-author • co-star, but the spellings coauthor, costar, etc., are acceptable.

coarse or course? These words are sometimes confused. Coarse means 'rough or crude': • coarse behaviour • coarse cloth. The noun course means 'progression of events': • in the course of time, or 'route': • The ship steered a difficult course. The verb course means 'hunt or pursue'; coursing is the sport in which hares are hunted with dogs.

* Coarse [not course] fishing is the activity of catching freshwater fish other than salmon or trout.

cocoon This word, which means 'protective covering': • The butterfly emerged from its cocoon, is sometimes misspelt. Note the second c and the -oo.

cohesive or cohesive? Coherent and cohesive have the same roots in the verb to cohere, but they are used differently. Coherent means logically consistent; comprehensible: • a coherent argument • coherent speech. Cohesive means 'clinging or sticking
cohort

This word, meaning 'a united group of people', is encountered with increasing frequency in the singular, referring to an individual supporter or accomplice: • He has emerged as a loyal cohort of the President. This usage is more common in American English than in British English and is avoided by careful users.

• A cohort is also a group of people sharing a particular statistical characteristic; • to compare the exam results of children within the various cohorts.

coffure This word, meaning 'hairstyle', is usually pronounced [kwaître]. This should be clearly distinguished from the pronunciation of coffeur meaning 'hairstylist' [kwaître].

• Note the different endings of these nouns and also the -ff- in the spelling.

colander see CALENDAR, CALENDAR or COLAN- 

dr

collaborate or cooperate? Both collabor- 

ate and cooperate mean 'work together for a common purpose': • The two scientists have collaborated/cooperated for years on various projects. Collaborate has the extra sense of working with or assisting an enemy, particularly an enemy occupier of one's country: • The French politicians who had collaborated with the Nazis were discredited after the war.

• Collaborate is more likely to be used of a cooperative enterprise of an intellectual or artistic nature: people might collaborate in writing a book but cooperate in organizing a party.

The verb collaborate is followed by the preposition in or on: • They have collaborated in [or on] a number of musicals.

collective nouns The term collective noun applies to such nouns as: • flock • gang • troop, which are usually followed by of and another noun: • a flock of sheep; to other nouns which apply to groups, such as: • audience • orchestra • crowd, and to 'class' collectives, which include various things of a certain kind: • furniture • underwear • greengrocery • cutlery.

• Some collective nouns have very restricted uses.

A pride can only be of lions; a school only of fish and other aquatic animals. Others, such as herd, have a more general use.

The main problem with collective nouns is whether to treat them as singular or plural. With some nouns there is no choice. Class collectives always take a singular verb: • My luggage is missing. Words for people in general or a particular class of person: • folk • the police, take a plural verb: • The clergy are up in arms about it. It is with group nouns such as: • audience • jury • committee that problems arise. American English treats them as singular: • The Government is undecided but British English treats them as either singular or plural: • The Government is are undecided. For the use of singular and plural verbs see individual entries and SINGULAR or PLURAL?

COLLECTIVE NOUNS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a herd</td>
<td>of an animal</td>
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<td>a shrewdness of</td>
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<td>a brood of</td>
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<td>a tribe of</td>
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<td>a cloud of</td>
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antelopes
apes
asses
badgers
barracudas
beasts
beavers
bees
boars
buffalo
bears
camel
cats
cattle
citizens
cocks
cormorants
d'ocidiles
crows
deer
dogs
dolphins
doves
ducks
eagles
elephants
elks
ferrets
finches
fish
foxes
frogs
geeze
goats
grasshoppers
**COLLECTORS AND ENTHUSIASTS** The right-hand column lists the field of activity that is referred to by the formal descriptive term for the relevant collector or enthusiast given in the left-hand column.

- **a bazaar of** guillemots
- **a husk of** hares
- **a cast of** hawks
- **an array of** hedgehogs
- **a brood of** hens
- **a siege of** hippopotamuses
- **a string of** horses
- **a pack of** hounds
- **a troop of** kangaroos
- **a kind of** kittens
- **a desert of** lapwings
- **an exaltation of** larks
- **a leap of** leopards
- **a pride of** lions
- **a plague of** locusts
- **a tittering of** magpies
- **a sord of** mallards
- **a labour of** moles
- **a troop of** monkeys
- **a barren of** muses
- **a watch of** nightingales
- **a family of** otters
- **a parliament of** owls
- **a pandemonium of** parrots
- **a coye of** partridges
- **a muster of** peacocks
- **a rookery of** penguins
- **a nye of** pheasants
- **a litter of** pigs
- **a congregation of** plovers
- **a school of** porpoises
- **a bevy of** quails
- **a bury of** rabbits
- **a colony of** rats
- **an unkindness of** ravens
- **a crash of** rhinoceroses
- **a building of** rooks
- **a pod of** seals
- **a flock of** sheep
- **a walk of** snipe
- **a host of** sparrows
- **a dray of** squirrels
- **a murmuration of** starlings
- **a flight of** swallows
- **a mutation of** thrushes
- **an ambush of** tigers
- **a knot of** teals
- **a rafter of** turkeys
- **a turn of** turtles
- **a gam of** whales
- **a rout of** wolves
- **a fall of** woodcocks
- **a descent of** woodpeckers
- **a zeal of** zebras

- **aerophile**
- **ailurophone**
- **antiquarian**
- **archaeologist**
- **arctophile**
- **argyrothecologist**
- **audiophile**
- **balletomane**
- **bibliomane**
- **biologist**
- **carniphile**
- **campanologist**
- **carnophile**
- **cartophile**
- **coleopterist**
- **conchologist**
- **coproologist**
- **cruciverbalist**
- **curmophile**
- **batologist**
- **ecclesiologist**
- **entomologist**
- **ephemerist**
- **epicure**
- **errnophile**
- **ex-librarian**
- **fossil hunter**
- **gastronomist**
- **geneticist**
- **gourmet**
- **herpetologist**
- **hipphile**
- **hostelophile**
- **iconophile**
- **incunabulist**
- **laberist**
- **lepidopterist**
- **medalist**
- **myrmecologist**
- **notaphile**
- **numismatist**
- **ophiophile**
- **omniphile**
- **ophiologist**
- **ophiophile**
- **orchidophile**

- **airmail stamps**
- **cats**
- **antiques**
- **spiders**
- **teddy bears**
- **money boxes**
- **sound recording**
- **ballet**
- **collecting books**
- **bookbinding**
- **books**
- **keys**
- **bell-ringing**
- **dogs**
- **cigarette and chewing-gum cards**
- **beetles**
- **shells**
- **key-rings**
- **crossword puzzles**
- **matchboxes**
- **picture postcards**
- **churches**
- **insects**
- **diary-keeping**
- **good food and drink**
- **non-postage stamps**
- **bookplates**
- **phonecards**
- **good eating**
- **gems**
- **good food and drink**
- **reptiles**
- **horses**
- **pub signs**
- **engravings, prints, and pictures**
- **early printed books**
- **beer bottle labels**
- **butterflies and moths**
- **medals**
- **ants**
- **banknotes**
- **coins and medals**
- **wine**
- **buses**
- **snakes**
- **orchids**
**colon** A colon introduces a clause or word which amplifies, interprets, explains, or reveals what has gone before it: • He was beginning to be anxious; they had been gone for five hours. • Only one party cares: Labour. Its other main uses are to introduce lists: • The Thames Valley Police Authority covers three counties: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire, and to introduce lengthier quotations, often when quotation marks are not used and the quoted material is indented. • The clause preceding a colon should usually be able to stand on its own grammatically.

Colon should be used after colons only if the word following is a proper noun; if the first word of a quotation is capitalized; if the colon follows a formal salutation or brief instruction; • To whom it may concern: • Note: Warning: or sometimes if the material following the colon is a whole sentence or sentences expressing a complete thought.

Colon are also used to introduce speech in plays: • Celia: Are you called Algernon? Algernon: I cannot deny it. They are used between titles and subtitles; • Men Who Play God: The Story of the Hydrogen Bomb: in biblical references between chapter and verse: • James 2:14–17; in business correspondence: • To: • Reference: and to show the relationship of one number to another; • The ratio was 2:1. Colon are also used in books such as this to introduce examples.

The use of the dash following a colon is restricted to lists, usually where each item starts on a new line and is indented. Even then the practice is old-fashioned and not recommended.

See also **DASH**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>colon</th>
<th>colonnade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A colon introduces a clause or word which amplifies, interprets, explains, or reveals what has gone before it: • He was beginning to be anxious; they had been gone for five hours. • Only one party cares: Labour. Its other main uses are to introduce lists: • The Thames Valley Police Authority covers three counties: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire, and to introduce lengthier quotations, often when quotation marks are not used and the quoted material is indented. • The clause preceding a colon should usually be able to stand on its own grammatically. Colon should be used after colons only if the word following is a proper noun; if the first word of a quotation is capitalized; if the colon follows a formal salutation or brief instruction; • To whom it may concern: • Note: Warning: or sometimes if the material following the colon is a whole sentence or sentences expressing a complete thought. Colon are also used to introduce speech in plays: • Celia: Are you called Algernon? Algernon: I cannot deny it. They are used between titles and subtitles; • Men Who Play God: The Story of the Hydrogen Bomb: in biblical references between chapter and verse: • James 2:14–17; in business correspondence: • To: • Reference: and to show the relationship of one number to another; • The ratio was 2:1. Colon are also used in books such as this to introduce examples. The use of the dash following a colon is restricted to lists, usually where each item starts on a new line and is indented. Even then the practice is old-fashioned and not recommended. See also <strong>DASH</strong>.</td>
<td>Note the spelling of this noun, meaning 'row of columns', particularly the -l- (as in column) and the -nn-.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
of writing. Excessively long sentences containing many clauses separated by commas are best divided into shorter units; short sentences that require many commas for clarity should be reworded if possible. The principal uses of the comma are listed below.

1. The individual items of a series of three or more are separated by commas; the final comma preceding and or or is optional: • We have invited Paul, Michael, Peter, and Mark. • She plays tennis, hockey and netball. • He doesn’t like cabbage, carrots, or beans.

The same conventions apply to series of longer units: • I closed the window, drew the curtains, and went to bed. Omission of the final comma may cause confusion if the last or penultimate item contains a: • They only serve tea, fish and chips, and beer and burgers.

2. The use of a comma between adjectives that precede the noun they qualify is optional in most cases: • a large, red, juicy tomato • a small round black button.

When the final adjective has a closer relationship with the noun, it should not be preceded by a comma: • a picturesque French village • an impertinent little boy • an eccentric old woman.

In the following examples, omission of the comma could cause ambiguity or confusion: • bright, blue curtains • a freshly toned, neatly folded shirt.

3. Commas separate non-restrictive (or non-defining) or parenthetical clauses and phrases from the rest of the sentence: • The mayor, who is very fond of gardening, presented the prizes at the flower show. • My diamond necklace, a valuable family heirloom, has been stolen.

It is important to ensure that both commas are present (unless the clause or phrase falls at the end of the sentence) and that they enclose the appropriate information; it should be possible to remove the words between the commas without affecting the basic message of the sentence. As a general rule, the subject of a sentence should not be separated from its verb by a single comma, although this rule is being flouted with increasing frequency when the subject is a long phrase: • A man killed by an inter-city express train at Hadfield station two weeks ago was one of the county’s leading bridge players (Bucks Herald). Commas are not used around restrictive (or defining) or essential clauses or phrases: • The classical guitarist Andrés Segovia has died. • The skirt that I bought last week has a broken zip.

In some cases, the removal or insertion of parenthetical commas can alter the meaning of a sentence: • My daughter Elizabeth is a doctor implies that the speaker has two or more daughters, one of whom is called Elizabeth; • My daughter, Elizabeth, is a doctor implies that the speaker has only one daughter.

See also APPOSITION; BRACKETS; CLAUSE; DASH; RESTRICTIVE CLAUSE; THAT or WHICH.

4. The use of the comma or commas to separate such words and phrases as however, therefore, nevertheless, of course, for example, and on the other hand from the rest of the sentence is optional: • I wondered, however, whether he was right. • The holiday will include visits to some of the local attractions, for example the caves and the pottery. • We could go by train or of course we could use the car.

5. Commas are always used to separate terms of address, interjections, and closing question tags from the rest of the sentence: • I’m sorry to have troubled you, madam. • Please sit down, Mr Smith, and tell me what happened. • Oh, what a beautiful garden! • It’s cold today, isn’t it?

6. The main clause of the sentence may be separated from a preceding subordinate clause or participial phrase by a comma. The comma is often omitted after a short clause or phrase: • After loading all their luggage into the car and locking up the house and garage, they set off on their holidays. • When it stops raining we will go out.

See also Dangling Particles.

7. Two or more main clauses linked by a coordinating conjunction and, or, but, etc.) may be separated with a comma if necessary. The comma is usually omitted if the clauses have the same subject or object: • He washed the dishes and Sarah dried them. • He shut the door but forgot to turn out the light. If the clauses are fairly short the comma is optional: • The lorry overturned but the driver was unjured. • The hotel is very comfortable, and the food is excellent.

Between longer or more complex main clauses, a comma is often necessary to avoid ambiguity or confusion. (Where such clauses are not linked by a coordinating conjunction, they should be separated by a SEMICOLON rather than a comma.)

8. A comma may be used in place of a repeated verb in the second of two related clauses: • She speaks French and German; her husband, Spanish and Italian.

See also DATES; LETTER WRITING; NUMBERS; QUOTATION MARKS.

callander, callander or commandeer? Commandant and commander are
nouns; commandeer is a verb. The noun commandant refers to an officer in command of a particular group or establishment, such as a military academy or prisoner-of-war camp; the noun commander refers to an officer in command of a military operation, ship, etc. Commander is also the name of a rank in the Navy and is used in nonmilitary contexts to denote anybody who is in command: • the commander of the expedition. The verb commandeer means 'seize, especially for military or public use': • They commandeered our car.

commemorate This word, meaning 'remember with a ceremony': • They commemorated the 50th anniversary of the revolution, is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the -mm- followed by a single m.

commence Commence means the same as begin or start but should be used only in formal contexts, where its opposite is conclude, rather than end: • The meeting will commence at 9.30 a.m. and conclude at noon.

It sounds affected or pompous if one uses commence in contexts where begin or start is appropriate: • I shall commence my new job tomorrow. • The car commenced making a rattling noise.

Commencement is the noun from commence and should be used in similar contexts: • the commencement of the financial year. It has a special meaning in the United States, where commencement is the ceremony at which students receive degrees.

commensurate Commensurate means 'equal in measure or extent; proportionate': • The rent charged is commensurate with the flat's current value. The word is frequently used in connection with job salaries: • Remuneration will be commensurate with the importance of this key role (Executive Post).

commercialese Commercialese is a usually pejorative term applied to the jargon used in the business and commercial world.

• Typically such jargon is found in business letters and includes such abbreviations as: • inst. (this month) • ult. (last month) • prx. (next month), as well as such phrases as: • Please find enclosed • Further to your letter • I beg to remain • your esteemed favour • your communication to hand.

Unlike other forms of jargon, commericalese is becoming distinctly old-fashioned and most modern companies prefer to conduct their correspondence in plain English.

commissionaire This word, meaning 'attendant in uniform': • the commissionaire at the theatre, is sometimes misspelt. Note the -mm-, -sr-, single -n-, and the -aire ending.

• Do not confuse this word with commissioner, meaning 'an important official of a government, etc.': • a high commissioner • the police commissioner.

commitment The sense of commitment which means 'loyalty to a cause or ideology' is an increasingly popular one: • a genuine Christian commitment • his commitment to the animal rights movement • As my commitment to the struggle for a racial justice intensified, I wanted to go further in my relationship with the black community (Jim Wallis, The New Radical). Many users dislike this word's overuse.

• Note the -mm- and single r of commit. The -t is not doubled in commitment, unlike committed, committing, etc.

committee The noun committee may be singular or plural: • The committee meets on Thursdays. • The committee were unable to reach a unanimous decision.

See also COLLECTIVE NOUNS; SINGULAR OR PLURAL?

Note the spelling of committee, particularly the -mm-, -sr-, and -ee.

common see MUTUAL; COMMON OR RECIPROCAL?

communal This word, meaning 'of a community': • communal living, has two different pronunciations. Both [ˈkɒmnjuːl] and [ˈkəmnuːl] are widely used. Careful speakers, however, prefer the first of these pronunciations.

communicate The verb communicate is followed by the preposition with or (something) to: • They communicated with each other through an interpreter. • She communicated the news to her staff.

community Community has become a vogue word in two different ways. The application of the word to a recognizable group within a larger society: • the Jewish community • the black community, has given the word an association with minority racial groups, and now a Council for Community Relations, a community relations officer, and so on, are those that deal with the problems of black and Asian minorities in Britain.
\* The community is also used in a much vaguer sense to mean 'society in general'. When psychiatric patients are discharged from hospital and are recommended to be cared for in the community it usually means no more than that they are to live in society.

comparable The traditional pronunciation of this word is [kompərəbl]. The variant [kɒmpərəbl] is avoided by careful speakers. See also STRESS.

comparative and superlative The comparative form of an adjective or adverb is used when two things or people are compared: • Anne is smaller than her sister, while the superlative is used as the highest degree of comparison between three or more things: • Anne is the smallest girl in her class.

The two main ways of forming comparatives and superlatives are by adding the suffixes -er and -est, or preceding the word with more or most: • sad-sadder-saddest • easier – more easier – most easier.

One-syllable words always take -er and -est, as do two-syllable words ending in -y: • big-bigger • pretty-prettiest. Two-syllable words ending in -le, -ow, -er sometimes also take -er and -est: • little–littlest • shallow-shallower • clever-cleverer. Other two-syllable words and all words of three or more syllables take more and most: • more abject • most horrific • most interesting.

Most compound adjectives can use either forms: • fairer-minded • more fair-minded. There are two well-known words with irregularly formed comparatives and superlatives: • good/well-better-best • bad/badly-worse-worst.

More is used instead of -er, even with one-syllable words, in certain contexts: when two adjectives are being compared with each other:

• He's really more shy than aloof; and when the aptness of an adjective is being challenged: • She's no more fat than a stick insect.

Absolute adjectives (see ADJECTIVES) cannot be used in comparative or superlative forms. One cannot say more total or emptier. It is, however, possible to use comparative forms when suggesting a closer approximation to perfection: • A fuller description will be given tomorrow.

Mistakes concerning comparatives and superlatives include the use of the comparative in phrases like: three times wider, ten times more expensive, instead of: • three times as wide • ten times as expensive, although when an actual measure is specified it is appropriate to say: • three feet wider • ten pounds more expensive. Another mistake is the use of more or -er in phrases like: • one of the more promising of the new novelists; when it is clear that more than two things or people are being compared, and the use of most or -est when only two things or people are being compared: We have two sons; Tom is the youngest. A (possibly deliberate) mistake much used by advertisers is the use of the comparative when it is unclear what is being compared: • X washes whiter and cleaner! • You give you a better, closer shave, and the unbridled use of superlatives: • The most luxurious holiday ever!

Finally, a frequent mistake is the misspelling of comparative as compative, probably based on comparison.

c omparatively Comparatively means 'relatively, as compared with a standard': • It was comparatively inexpensive for vintage champagne.

• It is often used as a synonym for 'rather, fairly, or somewhat', with no question of comparison: • It's a comparatively small resort, but many people dislike this usage.

c ompare to or compare with? Compare to and compare with are not interchangeable. Compare to is used when things are being likened to each other: • He compared her skin to ivory. Compare with is used when things are being considered from the point of view of both similarities and differences: • Tourists find London hotels expensive compared with those of other European capitals.

When compare is used intrinsically, with should always be used: • His direction compare with early Hitchcock.

• In American English compared to and comparable to are frequently used where with is appropriate: • Compared to my brother, I'm poor. • It's not comparable to the home-made version, and these uses are coming into British English.

c ompel or impel? Both these verbs mean 'force', but they differ in usage. Compel is used with human and non-human subjects and implies strong obligation: • They compelled us to take part. • Financial necessity compelled him to accept the job. Impel is chiefly used with non-human subjects and implies an urge rather than an obligation: • She felt impelled to protest. • Fear impelled him to turn back.

c ompete The verb compete is followed by the preposition with or against. • We found ourselves competing with [or against] three other companies for the contract.
**competent** The adjective competent is followed by the preposition **at** or **in**: • Applicants must be competent at [or in] word processing.

**competition or contest?** Competition and contest both involve rivalry with an opponent or opponents and can be synonymous: • at 18 she won a contest/competition for young musicians. However, contest is restricted to the sense of organized competitive events or exertions to achieve victory over opponents: • the contest for nomination as candidate. Competition is used more generally of rivalry: • There will be keen competition for tickets, and is also used of the people or organization against which one is competing: • We must assess the strengths and weaknesses of the competition.

**complacent or complaisant?** A complacent person is smug or self-satisfied; a complaisant person is obliging or willing to comply. Both adjectives may be applied to the same noun: • We can't lose, she said with a complacent smile. • He opened the door with a complaisant smile.

• The two words should not be confused. They are similar in pronunciation but quite different in spelling: complacent (kompläsənt) ends in -cent; complaisant (komplazyənt) ends in -sant.

Complacent is the more frequent word, complaisant being rather old-fashioned.

**complement** The complement of a clause or sentence provides essential additional information about the **subject** or **object**. A complement may be a noun, adjective, pronoun, or phrase.

• A subject complement usually follows such verbs as be, become, turn, look, appear, seem, feel, and sound. In the sentence • He became a teacher, a teacher is the complement. In • They felt disappointed, disappointed is the complement. The clause • where we live is the complement of the sentence This is where we live.

An object complement usually follows the direct object of such verbs as make, find, declare, elect, and call. In the sentence • You made me very proud, very proud is the complement. In • The judges declared him the winner, the winner is the complement.

See also **COMPLEMENT** or **COMPLIMENT?**

**COMPLEMENT or SUPPLEMENT?**

**complement or compliment?** These two words are often confused. Both as a noun and a verb, complement suggests the addition of something necessary to make something whole or complete: • a ship's complement • the flowers complemented the room's decor perfectly. Compliment is used as a noun and verb to refer to an expression of praise, respect, or admiration:

• She complimented her host on the excellent meal. • with the compliments of the management. To avoid mistakes remember the e of complement is also in complete.

• The derived adjectives complementary and complimentary are also confused, particularly when complimentary is used in the sense of 'given free':

• a complimentary [not complementary] copy of his latest book • two complimentary [not complimentary] tickets to the exhibition.

**complement or supplement?** Complement and supplement have a distinct difference in meaning. Both as noun and verb, complement suggests the addition of something necessary to make something whole or complete: • the closures were forced by the hospital's inability to recruit 92 nurses out of its full complement of nearly 800 (Daily Telegraph). • The music complemented the mime aptly. Supplement suggests an addition to something that is already complete:

• her fees for private tuition supplemented her teacher's salary. • Most Sunday newspapers publish a colour supplement.

**complementary medicine or alternative medicine?** Complementary medicine is the treatment of illnesses by such techniques and systems as osteopathy, acupuncture, and homoeopathy. The term complementary medicine suggests that the treatments and therapies complement — fit in with and work alongside — orthodox scientific medicine; the term alternative medicine, used for treatments such as herbalism and naturopathy, emphasizes that such treatments are completely different from those of conventional medicine.

**complete** When used to mean 'total' complete is an absolute adjective (see **ADJECTIVES**) and many people dislike any modification of it: • We were in almost complete darkness. However, complete also has the meaning of 'thorough': • a complete overhaul, and in that sense can be modified with more or most: • This is the most complete study of the period yet published.
complex The noun complex is taken from psychoanalysis, where it means 'a set of subconscious repressed ideas and emotions which can cause an abnormal mental condition': • an Oedipus complex • an inferiority complex. The term has been taken up and used popularly to mean any behavioural problem or obsession, even if it is completely conscious. This usage is disliked by some. • She's got a complex about spiders. • 'You're crazy,' Clevinger shouted... You've got a Jehovah complex' (Joseph Heller, Catch 22).

Complex is also used to mean 'something made up of interrelated parts' and this is now often applied to a group of buildings as in: • shopping complex • housing complex.

complex or complicated? Complex and complicated are very similar in meaning and the differences in usage are subtle ones. Both mean 'consisting of many parts which are intimately combined': • This is a complex/complicated problem.

Complicated emphasizes the fact that the multifaceted nature of a thing makes it difficult to solve or understand, and there is sometimes a negative connotation to it – a suggestion that it could possibly be simpler: • Compared with Scottish procedure, housebuying in England is unnecessarily complicated. Complex is more neutral and emphasizes the intricacy of the combination of parts rather than the resulting difficulties: • The blood-clotting system is a complex mechanism.

compliant The word compliant, meaning 'acquiescent' or 'complying', may be used in combination with other nouns to indicate that something conforms to a particular system, set of rules, etc.: • This program is fully web-compliant. • We have checked that the machine is industry-compliant.

compliment, complimentary see COMPLEMENT or COMPLIMENT?

compose, comprise or constitute? All these verbs are concerned with parts making up a whole. Compose and constitute are both used to mean 'come together to make (a whole)' but compose is usually used in the passive and constitute in the active: • The team is composed of several experts. • The commodities that constitute the average household diet. Comprise can only be used to mean 'consist of': • The house comprises three bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, and bathroom. Its use in place of constitute: • Eleven players comprise a team is not generally considered acceptable; its use in place of compose: • The team is comprised of eleven players is wrong.

See also CONSIST OF or CONSIST IN?; INCLUDE or COMPRISE?

compound A compound is a word that consists of two or more other words joined together, with or without a space or hyphen: • breakdown • forget-me-not • dining room.

There are no absolute rules governing the use of spaces and hyphens in many compounds (see HYPHEN 2).

The plural of a compound noun is usually formed by making the noun element plural: • passers-by • sons-in-law.

See also PLURALS.

The casing of new compound verbs, such as drug-test or rubber-stamp, is disliked by some people.

See also VERBS.

As a noun or adjective, the word compound is stressed on the first syllable (kom-pound); as a verb it is stressed on the second syllable (kom-pounds).

comprehend see APPREHEND or COMPREHEND?

comprehensible or comprehensive? These two adjectives are derived from different senses of the verb comprehend (see APPREHEND or COMPREHEND 5). Comprehensible means 'understandable'; comprehensive means 'including all or most things': • The explanation must be comprehensible to the average reader. • fully comprehensive car insurance.

comprise see COMPOSE, COMPRISE or CONSIST?

compulsive or compulsory? Both these adjectives are derived from the verb compel, meaning 'force'. Compulsive refers to something that one is forced to do by an internal or psychological urge; compulsory refers to something that one is forced to do by an external rule or law: • a compulsive gambler • a compulsory payment.

computerate The word computerate means 'able to operate a computer; experienced in computing'. It is a blend of the synonymous phrase computer literate (see
LITERAL, LITERARY or LITERATE?) and is often used in job advertisements: • Applicants must be computerate and able to work under pressure.

concede This verb, meaning ‘admit’ or ‘yield’, is sometimes misspelt. Note the -cede ending, as in the verb code, which is similar in meaning.

concept The precise meaning of concept is ‘an idea of a category or thing which is formed by generalization from particular instances’. The meaning has widened to embrace ideas in general, and is often now used to mean ‘an accepted idea of a particular thing’: • the concept of alternative medicine. It is frequently used very loosely to mean little more than ‘an idea or notion’, particularly in advertising. Many people dislike this usage: • a new concept in slimming.

◆ Conceptualize means ‘form a concept’ or ‘interpret conceptually’: • The Greeks conceptualized all their experiences in terms of the gods. It should not be used to mean ‘think’, ‘imagine’, or ‘visualize’.

concerned The adjective concerned may be followed by about or for when it means ‘anxious’ and by with when it means ‘on the subject of’: • We are very concerned about pollution. • The article is concerned with pollution. • They are concerned for his health. • The organisation is concerned with public health.

◆ For discussion of the phrase as far as... is concerned, see AS FAR AS.

concerning Concerning means ‘relating to, on the subject of, or about’: • The head teacher is available to talk to people concerning their career choices.

◆ It is normally used between two clauses rather than at the beginning of a sentence and is rather more formal than about.

condemn or condone These words are opposite in meaning. To condemn means ‘declare something to be unacceptably bad or evil’ or ‘give a punishment to someone’: • to condemn the atrocieties/terrorist activities • The prisoners were condemned to death. To condone behaviour that is wrong means to accept it, or turn a blind eye to it, considering it harmless or unimportant. Condone is sometimes used with a negative, hence the possible confusion with condemn:

◆ The association does not condone reckless driving.

condition or precondition? A condition is a requirement or stipulation on which an agreement or contract depends: • I will let you go on condition that you are back before midnight. While a condition can be fulfilled either before or after the agreement is made, a precondition is a requirement that must be satisfied in advance of an agreement being made: • Ascent to the manifesto was a precondition of membership.

◆ Condition can be used, not just of agreements, but also of situations and states of being: • the condition of the world • in good/poor condition. The words condition and precondition are used synonymously to mean anything which has to be true or occur before something else can happen: • The establishment of a just society is an essential condition/precondition for peace.

condone see CONDEMN or CONDONE?

conducive The adjective conducive is followed by the preposition to: • an environment conducive to mental concentration.

conduit This word, which describes a pipe or channel conveying liquid, has various pronunciations. The most widely used is [konˈdaɪt], but [konˈdɪt], [konˈdict], and [konˈdict] are also heard.

confidant or confident? A confidant, feminine confidante, is someone in whom one can confide. Both words are pronounced either [konˈfɪdant] or [konˈfɛdant]. These nouns should not be confused with the adjective confident which means ‘assured or certain’: • a confident young man.

confide The verb confide is followed by the preposition in or to: • He confided in his sister. • He confided his problems to his sister.

conform The verb conform is followed by the preposition with or to: • The results did not conform with [or to] our expectations.

confrontation A confrontation is a face-to-face meeting, especially in the context of opposition, challenge, or defiance: • St George’s confrontation with the dragon. Popular journalism has now weakened the meaning so that any disagreement or conflict of ideas is now inevitably referred to as a confrontation.
congenial, genial, congenital or genetical? Both congenial and genial mean 'pleasant'; congenial is usually applied to abstract nouns and genial to people: • a congenial atmosphere • He finds the work congenial. • a genial host. Congenial company refers to people who share one's interests or attitudes; genial company refers to people who are friendly and cheerful.

Congenial means 'existing from birth'; genetic means 'relating to genes'; congenital brain damage • genetic engineering. A congenital defect is not hereditary or inherited; a genetic defect is hereditary or inherited.

The adjectives congenial and genial are sometimes confused, being similar in spelling. Note that the e of congenital is short, as in mean, whereas the e of congenial is long, as in mean.

congressman or congresswoman? see non-sexist terms.

congruent or congruous? Both congruent and congruous are formal words. If one thing is congruent with another, there is a similarity or connection between them: • ritualistic and mystical elements congruent with the expectations of converted pagans. Congruous refers to something that is in harmony with something else: • decorations congruous with their surroundings. Congruous is more often found in its negative form incongruous, which is less formal than congruous and is used to refer to a person or thing that seems strange and out of place: • behaviour that was incongruous with his beliefs. In mathematics, two shapes are congruent if they are equal in size and shape: • congruent triangles.

conjoined Conjoined twins is the preferred term for babies that are born joined together, replacing the previous Siamese twins: • The doctors have succeeded in separating conjoined twins delivered at the hospital last Sunday.

conjunctions Conjunctions are words which link two or more words, clauses, or sentences: • and • but • or • because • when.

And, but, yet, and or are known as coordinating conjunctions. They connect words and clauses of the same grammatical type: • Martha and Mary • I love Mozart but I detest Mahler. They often connect clauses which share a common verb and this does not need to be repeated: • She is young yet surprisingly wise. But and yet can be used only to link two sentence elements, but and and or can link more than two: • I'm tired and cold and hungry and miserable.

Conjunctions such as because, when, if, though, unless are known as subordinating conjunctions, as they connect a subordinate clause to its main clause: • He's fat because he eats too much. • It won't work unless everyone cooperates.

Correlative conjunctions are the pairs either... or and neither... nor which are always used together: • Neither Williams nor Jenkins is now an MP. • He's either wicked or mad.

Few people still have objections to sentences starting with the conjunctions and, but, and, or, which can be effective if used sparingly.

See also individual entries for conjunctions and singular or plural?

conjurer or conjuror? Either spelling is perfectly acceptable.

connect The verb connect is followed by the preposition to or with in the sense 'join': • A narrow lane connects the farm to [or with] the village. In the sense 'associate' it is followed by the preposition with: • The broken window may not be connected with the robbery.

connection or connexion? This word, meaning 'a relationship between two things; joint': • His death must have had some connection with the stormy weather. • faulty electrical connections. Is usually spelt connexion. Connexion is a rarer variant spelling, especially in British English.

connoisseur A person who is an expert within a certain field is called a connoisseur. Note the -mn-, -oi-, and -oo- in the spelling.

connote or denote? These two verbs are sometimes confused. Denote, the more frequent of the two, refers to the literal or primary meaning of something: • The word 'bachelor' denotes an unmarried man. • Tears do not always denote sadness. Connote, a more formal word, means 'imply' or
'suggest', referring to secondary meaning or association: • For some people, the word 'bachelor' connotes freedom.

**conscience** 

Note the spelling of this word, particularly the -ce in the middle and the -ce ending. The second syllable is identical in spelling (but not in pronunciation) with the noun science.

**conscientious or conscious?** Conscientious means 'diligent and careful': • She was a conscientious worker. Conscious means 'aware' or 'awake': • He was so tired he was barely conscious. Both words are sometimes misspelt: note in particular the -ce in the middle of both words and the -t in conscientious.

**consensus** Consensus means 'opinion shared unanimously, a view generally held or accepted': • He had broken the pro-nuclear consensus shared by all postwar leaders (Sunday Times).

• As the meaning contains the idea of a generally held opinion, the frequently used expressions general consensus and consensus of opinion are tautologies, and are avoided by careful users.

Consensus is frequently misspelt as consensus, perhaps from a mistaken belief that it is connected with the word census, in fact it derives from the same root as consent.

**consent** see ASSENT or CONSENT?

**consequent or consequential?** Consequent means 'following as a direct result': • She was knocked down by a lorry and her consequent injuries left her a permanent invalid. Consequential, a rarer word than consequent, is also used to mean 'following as a direct result': • the improvement in the local economy and the consequential loss of the area's special status. Consequential also means 'important': • Their decisions were becoming increasingly consequential in determining the direction of the company. It is also used in legal expressions such as consequential loss to mean 'an indirect result' and has the additional meaning of 'self-important; pompous': • His manner was pretentious and consequential.

**consequent or subsequent?** Consequent and subsequent are sometimes confused. While consequent means 'following as a direct result', subsequent simply means 'occurring after': • her bereavement and consequent grief • her bereavement and subsequent remarriage. Consequent takes the preposition on, while subsequent takes to: • increase in salaries consequent on the pay review • his behaviour subsequent to his arrival.

**consequential** see CONSEQUENTIAL or CONSEQUENTIAL?

**conservative or Conservative?** The word conservative with a lowercase c means 'tending to support tradition and established institutions, opposed to change, moderate, cautious, conventional': • The college has a reputation for being conservative and still refuses to admit women students. • He has conservative tastes and wears in sombre colours. • A Conservative is someone who supports or is a member of the Conservative Party in Britain or elsewhere; it is also used as an adjective: • a Conservative MP.

• A conservative estimate is one that is cautious and moderate, but the term is often used to mean 'a low estimate': • It's worth a million pounds at the most conservative estimate.

**consider** Consider means 'regard as being': • I consider him a nonentity, 'think about carefully': • I have considered all aspects of the problem, and 'regard sympathetically': • We will not fail to consider your feelings on the matter.

• In the first sense given above, consider is more or less synonymous with regard as, and this leads some people to add as to consider. • He considered their work as vitally important. This construction is wrong. There is, however, nothing wrong with using as when consider is used in the sense of 'think about, give consideration to'; • The songs are tuneful but considered as an opera, the work lacks solidity.

**considerable** Considerable means 'worth consideration; significant': • She has made a considerable contribution to biochemical research. It has been extended to mean 'large in amount': • They have saved a considerable amount of money, although some people dislike the imprecise nature of this use.

• Considerable is usually attached to abstract nouns: • a considerable quantity • considerable numbers of, but in American English it can be used with concrete nouns: • They have mined considerable gold. This use is not yet acceptable in British English although when the meaning is 'significant'
one can attach considerable to a concrete noun: • a considerable pianist.

**consist** of or **consist in**? Consist of means 'comprise, be made up of': • Breakfast consists of bread, croissants, jam, and coffee. Consist in means 'have its essence in': • The appeal of the writing consists in its use of language rather than its content.

• Consist of usually precedes a list of concrete nouns, while consist in is usually applied to abstract nouns.

**consonant** A consonant is the sound represented by any of the letters b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, and z in the English language. Compare VOWEL.

• The presence of a consonant at the beginning of a word may affect the form or pronunciation of the preceding word (see A or AN?; THE).

• Note that in such words as party and rhyme, the letter -y functions as a vowel.

**consortium** or **consortia**? Consortia is a plural form of the noun consortium, which means 'association of companies': • A consortium of insurance brokers. The plural form -ia is sometimes wrongly used in place of the singular noun: • Now only Phonepoint, a consortium led by British Telecom, and Bays, owned by Hutchison Telecom UK, are keen to offer the mobile phone service (The Guardian).

• The plural form consortium is also acceptable.

**constable** A police officer of the lowest rank is known as a constable. The word has two pronunciations: [kanstəlb] or [kon-stəlb], both of which are acceptable.

**constitute** see COMPOSE, COM普RE or CONSTITUTE?

**constrain** or **restrain**? Both these verbs mean 'hold back' or 'limit', but there are differences of usage and application between them. Constrain is more formal and implies an abstract or undesirable restriction; restrain may involve physical force: • Such strict guidelines constrain creativity. • He struggled to restrain the dog.

• Constrain has the additional and more frequent meaning of 'compel': I felt constrained to resign.

**contact** The meanings of contact as a noun include 'the state of touching': • He avoided all physical contact with dogs, 'link or relationship': • The two towns have commercial contacts, and 'communication': • I am in regular contact with her. A modern use is 'a person one knows who may be useful to one': • I have a good contact at the Home Office.

• The use of the verb contact to mean 'communicate with': • I will contact you next week is still disliked as an Americanism by some people. It is, however, particularly useful in cases where one wishes to avoid specifying whether communication will be made by letter, telephone, message, or personal visit.

**contagious** or **infectious**? Contagious and infectious are both used of diseases that can be passed on to others. Contagious diseases are those that are passed on by physical contact, like venereal diseases or impetigo; infectious diseases are those passed on by airborne or waterborne microorganisms, like measles or influenza.

• In figurative use the words are synonymous: • His optimistic mood was infectious.

**containerize** Containerize is a verb formed from the noun container in its sense of a large packing case in which goods are transported by road and sea, being handled mechanically throughout. To containerize means both 'pack into containers for transport and transport in this method': • The beans must be containerized before the end of the week; and 'change over to the use of containers': • We are containerizing our shipping procedures.

**contemporary** The primary meaning of contemporary is 'happening or living at the same time as': • Joyce was contemporary with the Bloomsbury group, though not a member of it. It has more recently been used to mean 'happening at the present time, current': • Contemporary values are materialistic and selfish.

• A development of this meaning has been the use of contemporary to mean 'modern, up-to-date', sometimes qualified with very, extremely, etc.: • They sell the most contemporary fashions in town. This use is disliked by many people and is best avoided. One should beware of ambiguities between the first and second meanings of contemporary: a contemporary biography of Shelley may mean one written when Shelley was alive, or one written recently.

**contemptible** or **contemptuous**? Both contemptible and contemptuous are con-
contested with contempt, but they have distinctly different meanings. Contemnable means 'despicable; deserving scorn or contempt': • His meanness was contemptible. Contemptuous means 'scornful, feeling or showing contempt': • She observed his feeble efforts with a contemptuous smile.

**Contest** see **COMPETITION** or Contest?

**Contingency** A contingency is 'something that happens by chance; something unforeseen that might possibly occur in the future': • We must prepare ourselves for every contingency.

- In modern use the word almost always appears in the phrase contingency plans and is usually applied, not to unforeseen future events, but to those that are predictable, although not inevitable:
  - The council have made contingency plans in case of a severe winter.

**Continual or continuous?** Continual means 'frequently repeated': continuous means 'without break or interruption': • Our neighbour's continual complaints forced us to move house. • The continual noise from the generator kept him awake all night.

- The fundamental difference in sense, which also applies to the adverbs continually and continuously, is that something continual stops from time to time, whereas something continuous does not stop until it reaches its natural end. It is acceptable in certain contexts to interchange the two words, but this may lead to ambiguity and is therefore best avoided if possible. Continual is not used of physical objects, such as a continual roll of paper, nor may continuous be substituted for continual in such phrases as: • continual interruptions.

**Continuance, continuation or continuity?** All three nouns are derived from the verb continue. Continuance is the act of continuing, usually without a break, whereas continuation may be the act of continuing after a break: • the continuance of the strike • a continuation of yesterday's discussion. In some contexts, such as the first example above, continuance and continuation are interchangeable. Continuity is the state of being continuous (see **Continual** or **continuous**?): • the continuity of the action.

**Continuous** see **Continual** or Continuous?

**Continuous tense** see **Progressive tense**

**contractions** The most common contractions in English are those of the verbs am, are, is, have, has, had, will, shall, would, and the word not combined with an auxiliary verb: • I'm • you're • she's • we've • he'll • they'd • can't • shouldn't.

- An apostrophe indicates the missing letter(s), although in the contraction shan't, where there are actually two sets of missing letters, only the missing e is indicated. The contracted form 'd can stand for either had or would, and 's can be either is or has – or us when used in the word let's: it should always be clear from the context which word is intended. Two irregular contractions are won't (will not) and aren't (are not), which can also mean am not, as in: • Aren't I right? • Aren't I clever!

Contractions are almost always used in speech. They should always be used in written passages of dialogue, and they are generally acceptable in all but the most formal writing. Some contractions are more likely to be written than others. • He's late and: • Jill's late are more acceptable in writing than; • Dinner's late • The train's late, and the 'll contraction (except when used with personal pronouns: • I'll): • Tim'll be there. • The bus'll be on time is not usually used in writing.

Care should be taken with the placing of the apostrophe. A frequent mistake is placing it where the syllables break, rather than where the letter is missing: • wouldn't (not would'nt).

See also **AINT**; 's or **s**?

**Contrary** This word, meaning 'opposed in position': • On the contrary, I would like to go for a walk, is stressed on the first syllable [konträrɪ]. Only in the sense 'opposite or stubborn': • such a contrary girl, is it stressed on the second syllable [konträrɪ]:

**contribute** In the traditional pronunciation of this word, the stress is on the second syllable [kɒntrɪbju:t]; some users dislike the pronunciation with the word stressed on the first syllable [kɒntrɪbju:t].

**Controversy** In the traditional pronunciation of this word, the stress falls on the first syllable [kɒntrəvɜːrsi]. The variant pronunciation, with stress on the second syllable [kɒntrəvrəsɪ], is widely heard, but is disliked by many users.

See also **stress**

**Convalescence** This word, meaning 'recovery after an illness', is sometimes misspelt. Note the combinations se and ne.
convenient  The adjective convenient is followed by the preposition to or for: • Come whenever it is convenient to [or for] you.

converse, inverse, obverse or reverse
These four words share the sense of ‘opposite’; in some contexts they are interchangeable. The noun converse specifically denotes something that is opposite in meaning; • the converse of this statement. Inverse is more frequently used as an adjective in such phrases as • in inverse proportion; obverse, a formal word and the least common of the four, refers to a counterpart: • The obverse of the company’s success is the failure of its rivals. Reverse, the most frequent and general of the four words, may be used as a verb, noun, or adjective: • to reverse a decision • to do the reverse • in reverse order.

Obverse and reverse may also refer to the two sides of a coin, obverse being ‘heads’ and reverse ‘tails’.

The converse of a statement or proposition is one that reverses the elements of the proposition: • You say that your mother dislikes you but in fact the converse is true – you dislike your mother. The word is now usually used more loosely to mean ‘opposite’; • The previous speaker claimed that nuclear weapons help to preserve peace, but I maintain the converse. The adverb conversely, similarly, is now used to mean just ‘on the other hand’; • In such an emergency one can stop the car or, conversely, one can accelerate out of danger.

The noun or adjective converse is stressed on the first syllable [kon’vərs]. The verb converse, meaning ‘have a conversation’, is stressed on the second syllable [kon’vərse].

convertible  This word, meaning ‘capable of being changed’: • convertible car, is sometimes misspelt. The ending is -ible, not -able.

cool  Cool is widely employed as a slang term variously meaning ‘fashionable’ or ‘excellent’: • He looks really cool in that jacket. • We had a cool time at the party. As the dominant slang term of approval among young people since the late 1980s, it is used both in longer sentences and on its own as an exclamation. Its overuse should be avoided: • We could go to a restaurant later. ‘Cool.’

See also CHILL.

cooperate see COLLABORATE or COOPERATE?
cord see CHORD or CORD?
cordon bleu  The French phrase cordon bleu is used to refer to cookery or a cook of the highest standard: • cordon bleu cuisine.

• The French phrase literally means ‘blue ribbon’, from the blue ribbon worn by members of the highest order of chivalry under the Bourbon monarchy. Its anglicized pronunciation is [kɔdɔn blo] bler.

co-respondent see CORRESPONDENT or CO-RESPONDENT?
corporal or corporeal?  Corporal means ‘relating to the body’: • corporal punishment. It should not be confused with corporeal, which means ‘physical’ or ‘material’: • Her imaginary friend has no corporeal reality.

• Corporal is pronounced [kɔrprəl]. Corporeal is pronounced [kɔrˈpɛrəl].
corps or corpse?  The noun corps, meaning ‘body of people’, should not be confused with the noun corpse, meaning ‘dead body’: • the diplomatic corps • The corpse lay undiscovered for several weeks.

• Both are ultimately derived from the Latin corpus ‘body’, via the French noun corps. The English word corps retains the French pronunciation [kɔr], whereas corpse, which entered English from Old French some 400 years earlier, is pronounced [kɔrpəs].

correspond  There are two main meanings of correspond. One is ‘communicate with someone by exchange of letters’: • He met his Italian penfriend after they had corresponded for years. The other meaning is ‘match or be equivalent or comparable in some respect’: • Your account corresponds exactly with the description of the other witnesses. • The French baccalauréat roughly corresponds to the British A-level exam.

• In this second meaning correspond to is considered correct by many careful users, although correspond with is often used.

 correspondent or co-respondent?  A correspondent is someone who communicates by letter: • She has correspondents in three continents, or someone who contributes news reports to a newspaper or to radio
or television programmes: • And now a report from our Middle East correspondent. A co-respondent is the person cited in divorce proceedings as the lover of the husband or wife who has been accused of adultery. • Divorced couples hobnob with each other and with each other's co-respondents (Noel Coward, Present Indicative).

**cosmetic** Some people dislike the use of cosmetic as an adjective to apply to anything that improves the outward appearance of something: • One supplier of decaffeinated coffee . . . plans to switch from the chemical process . . . although a spokesman insisted this was necessary for cosmetic reasons only (Sunday Times).

* It is extended further to anything which makes a superficial improvement but does not make any fundamental change: • Opposition claims that the Government's Inner-city plans would have only a cosmetic effect were hotly denied by the Department of the Environment.

**cost or price?** Cost and price are often used synonymously as nouns to mean 'the amount paid or charged for something': • We were afraid the cost of the sofa would be more than we could afford. Cost is more likely to refer to an amount paid and price to an amount charged: • An increase in manufacturing costs will result in higher prices.

• Price is more often used when preceded by an adjective: • an exorbitant price • bargain prices, and when speaking of the amount needed in order to bribe someone: • 'All those men have their price' (Sir Robert Walpole). Cost is used in the plural for the expenses of a lawsuit: • The court awarded him costs, and either cost or price is used to describe the expenditure in terms of effort and sacrifice made in order to achieve an end: • 'To give and not to count the cost' (St Ignatius Loyola). • This was indeed a high price to pay for success.

**couch potato** The slang term couch potato originated in American English in the mid-1970s and entered British English in the late 1980s. It is applied to people who spend most of their leisure time watching television: • We are inexorably mutating into a coast-to-coast allotment of couch potatoes (The Guardian). The term is best avoided in formal contexts.

**could see** CAN or MAY?

**could have or could of?** see OF.

**council or counsel?** The noun council means 'a body of people meeting for discussion and consultation': • the county council. The noun counsel means 'advice': • She always gave wise council, and the corresponding verb counsel means 'give advice to someone'.

• A councillor (in American English, sometimes counselor) is a person who belongs to a council, just as a counselor (in American English, sometimes counsellor) is a person who counsels: • marriage-guidance counselors.

A counsel is a lawyer or group of lawyers: • Queen's Counsel • the counsel for the defence.

**counsel or advise?** In many instances counsel and advise are synonymous, although counsel is rather more formal: • I would advise/counsel you not to drink any more if you're driving home. Advise is more likely to be used in informal contexts and when the advice is not of great importance: • He advised me to go on the ring road. Counsel is more appropriate when the advice is serious and when it is given by trained or professional counsellors: • He has been counselled by social workers, doctors, and clergy but he still can't sort out his problems.

**COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES**

The right-hand column lists the words used as adjectives and nouns referring to the countries in the left-hand column and their people. A single item in the right-hand column, such as 'Albanian', indicates that the same word is used as adjective and noun. 'Argentinian or Argentine' indicates that either of these words may be used as an adjective or a noun.

Where the adjective and noun are not identical, they are separated by a semicolon, with the adjective first: Danish; a Dane' indicates that Danish is the adjective and Dane the noun.

Most of the nouns can be converted to plural or collective form by adding -s: • the Albanians • a party of Danes. However, the plural and collective form of nouns ending in -er and -oir is identical to the singular form: • the Chinore • the Seychellois. Other
irregular plurals and collective forms are separated from the singular noun by a second semicolon, as at 'Lesothan; a Mosotho . . . ; the Basotho . . . ' and 'Irish; an Irishman (or -woman); the Irish'.

Cross-references, e.g. see CHINESE, are also included to main entries in the Good Word Guide.

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country or countryside Both these words may be used to denote a rural area: • We went for a walk in the country/countryside. Country is commonly preceded by the and usually only country occurs before a noun; • the English countryside • a country cottage.

- In the sense of ‘nation’ or ‘state’, the noun country cannot be replaced by countryside: • A flu epidemic is sweeping the country [not countryside].

country or nation These words are often used interchangeably: • the poorer countries/nations of the world. Strictly speaking country should be used when the context is one of geographical characteristics: • Wales is a mountainous country, and nation when speaking of the people or of social and political characteristics: • Wales is a nation of musicians and orators.

- Nation carries a suggestion of a people with a common culture, language, and traditions, and is often better replaced with the more general people when describing a multicultural society like modern Britain.

countryman or countrywoman see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

countryside see COUNTRY or COUNTRYSIDE

coup de grâce The French expression coup de grâce is a formal phrase that is used to refer to an event that finally destroys something: • The latest bombings have effectively dealt a coup de grâce to the whole peace process.

- The literal meaning of the expression is ‘stroke of mercy’. It is sometimes written or printed in italics and its anglicized pronunciation is [koo de grahs]. The accent on the à in grâce is sometimes omitted.

coup d’état The French expression coup d’état is used to refer to a sudden, violent
course 76

seizure of power in a country. The phrase is often shortened to simply coup.

- The literal meaning of the expression is 'stroke of state'. Note that it is sometimes written or printed in italics. The plural of coup d'état is coups d'état. Both the singular and plural have the same pronunciation (koo day tah).

course see coarse or course'; of course.

cover The verb cover is followed by the preposition in or with: • The floor was covered in [or with] sawdust.

crafted This word, meaning 'skilfully made', is sometimes used simply as a synonym for 'made' or 'produced' in exaggerated sales descriptions: • fitted cupboards crafted from the finest wood. Many people dislike this usage.

craftsmen or crafts women? see non-sexist terms.

crash The adjectival use of crash in the sense of 'intensive' is best restricted to the few phrases in which it is most familiar: • a crash diet • a crash course.

- The word should not be used in contexts that may be associated with its sense of 'collision': • an intensive [crash] course in air-traffic control.

creak or creek? Creek means 'make a scraping sound': • The door creaked on its hinges. It should not be confused with creek, which variously means 'inlet or bay on a shoreline' or, in American English, 'stream flowing into a river': • The smugglers hoped to lure the ship into the creek. • They followed the creek to the main river.

- Both words are pronounced [kreek].

creative The adjective creative traditionally refers to originality and imagination used for artistic purposes: • a creative mind • She is very creative. It is increasingly used in a less favourable sense, describing something that stretches the limits of convention, legality, or truth: • creative accounting/ bookkeeping.

credence or credibility? Credence is the state of believing something; credibility is the state of being believable: • He gave credence to her explanation. • Her explanation lacked credibility. The two nouns should not be confused.

- Credence, a formal word, is also used in the phrase letters of credence, meaning 'credentials'.

Credibility is increasingly used as a vogue word meaning 'power to convince or impress': • Appointing such a senior figure to the post would give instant credibility to any administration.

Credence and credibility should not be confused with creed, 'a set of beliefs'.

See also credible, creditable or credulous?

credibility gap Credibility gap is a fashionable expression used to describe the lack of trust created by a discrepancy between what is said officially and what is actually seen to happen: • The public cynically accepts the credibility gap between election promises and the Government's subsequent policies.

credible, creditable or credulous? The three adjectives credible, creditable, and credulous, and their corresponding nouns credibility, credit, and credulity are sometimes confused. Credible means 'believable': • My story may sound barely credible but I assure you it's true. Creditable means 'deserving praise': • Her readiness to forgive her attacker is creditable. Credulous means 'gullible; too ready to believe': • Only the most credulous person could believe such nonsense.

- There is a further, fashionable use of credible to mean 'authentic; convincing': • They serve a credible paella.

See also credence or credibility?

creed see credence or credibility?

creek see creak or creek?

creep Creep has recently acquired a new noun meaning beside that of 'move slowly' or 'approach' and may now denote an expansion of something beyond its intended or officially sanctioned scope: • The American forces in Afghanistan could be leaving themselves open to charges of mission creep. • This is a clear example of jargon-creep.

In this usage creep remains a vogue term and is best avoided in formal contexts.

crème de la crème The French expression crème de la crème is used to refer to the best people or things of their kind: • The fee-paying schools take the crème de la crème of local children.

- The literal meaning of the example is 'cream of the cream': it is pronounced [krem de la krem].

crescendo Crescendo is a musical term that is frequently misused in both its technical and figurative senses. In music it describes a gradual increase in volume: • The bras
sections take up the theme as the crescendo build up. It can be used of other sounds or to describe any build-up of intensity: • The baby’s whimpering increased in a crescendo to a howl. • Public interest in the matter has risen in a crescendo.

Because people sometimes mistakenly refer to building up to a crescendo, the word is often interpreted to mean the loud climax which is actually the culmination of a crescendo, and it is used to mean both ‘a loud noise’ and, in figurative contexts, ‘peak, climax, or milestone’: • The drum solo ended in a deafening crescendo. • She reached the crescendo of her career before she was 30.

cripple The term cripple is considered offensive by many people when referring to a person with a physical impairment. Careful users avoid cripple or crippled and prefer other terms: see DISABLED.

crisis Crisis literally means ‘turning point’ and it should be used for situations that have reached a turning point for better or worse, for decisive moments in dramas, for crucial states of affairs where significant changes are likely: • The illness had passed its crisis and it was clear that she would live. • the worsening economic crisis. • It is feared that the crisis which resulted in the military coup may lead to civil war.

To the dislike of some people, crisis is now often applied to situations which are worrying or serious but without any definite implication of imminent change: • Independent television is facing a crisis through declining audiences (Daily Telegraph), or for quite trivial problems: • I’ve got a crisis here – my zip’s broken.

Note the spelling of the plural of crisis, which is crises, pronounced [kriːsɪz].

criterion or criteria? The word criterion, meaning ‘a standard by which to judge or evaluate something’, is a singular noun: • Exam results were the only criterion for deciding whether candidates should be interviewed. The plural of criterion is criteria: • on the condition that the basic criteria of the code are accepted and met (The Bookcycler).

Many people take criterion to be a singular noun with the plural criterias. This is wrong. It is, however, acceptable to use the phrase set of criteria as an alternative to criterion when a singular expression is required: • Pay awards may be given according to the following set of criteria.

The noun criterion is followed by the preposition of or for: • the only criterion of [or for] success.

critic or critique? A critic is someone who criticizes. The word is sometimes used in the sense of someone who finds fault or expresses disapproval: • Acupuncture has many critics in the medical profession. It is also used of someone who is employed to evaluate works of art, music, or literature: • The public loved the play but the critics did not have a good word to say for it. A critique is a work of criticism, usually applied to an academic work which analyses and discusses ideas in depth: • This is a thoughtful critique of logical positivism.

critical Critical means ‘inclined to judge severely’: • My mother is so critical of the way I bring up the children; involving careful or scholarly evaluation’: • a critical account of Jung’s work; ‘involving a turning point; crucial’: • We are at a critical point in our negotiations.

This last use is often applied to serious or dangerous illnesses or injuries: • in a critical condition and has in its turn led to such uses as: • A woman was later described as critical in hospital, with one wrist almost severed (Daily Telegraph).

critique see CRITIC or CRITIQUE²

crochet or crotch² The noun crochet refers to a type of needlework; the noun crotch is the name of a note in music.

Crochet is a word of French origin that retains the French pronunciation [kroʃɛ] in English. The past tense of the verb crochet is crocheted, spelt with a single -t- and pronounced [krɔʃt].

The noun crotch, pronounced [kroːtʃ], has the derived adjective crotchy, which means ‘irritable’ in informal English.

cross-section A cross-section is a piece of something which has been cut off at right angles or a drawing of the dimensions revealed by such a cutting: • The diagram shows an artery in cross-section. The expression is more often used popularly to mean ‘a typical or representative sample’: • Over five thousand people were interviewed as a cross-section of the general public.

crotch or crotch² Either noun may be used to denote the angle between a person’s legs (hence, the genital area) or the corresponding part of a garment (such as a pair of trousers). The term crotch is more fre-
crotch

quently used in these senses, but crotch is not incorrect.

♦ The principal meaning of the noun crotch is ‘support used by people with injured legs or feet’: She was on crutches for three months after the accident.

crotch see CROUCH or CRUNCH?

crucial The use of crucial as a synonym for important is best avoided in formal speech and writing, where it should be restricted to the sense of ‘decisive’ or ‘critical’: • constituencies where the self-employed vote could be crucial to the outcome of the election (Daily Telegraph).

♦ Crucial is widely used in informal contexts, and increasingly by journalists, broadcasters, advertisers, and others, to emphasize the importance of events or issues that are by no means decisive or critical. The word has the same derivation as cross, meaning ‘a decisive point’, which is most frequently encountered in the expression the cross of the matter.

crutch see CROUCH or CRUNCH?

cue or queue? Cue means ‘signal’: • The actor heard his cue. It also means ‘rod, as in the games of billiards, snooker, etc.’: • teach someone how to hold their cue properly. It should not be confused with queue, which means ‘line’ or ‘sequence’: • a queue of traffic.

cuisine The word cuisine is used to describe a style of cooking food, particularly one which is typical of a particular country or region: • Peppers and tomatoes are characteristic of Basque cuisine; for the food itself: • Their cuisine is excellent; and in various phrases which convey a particular style of cooking: • nouvelle cuisine • cuisine minceur.

♦ Cuisine carries a suggestion of good food skillfully cooked so its use in such a sentence as: • It was typical service-station cuisine – chips with everything is either inappropriate or jocular.

cullender see CALENDAR, CALENDAR or COLANDER?

culminate Culminate means ‘form a summit; reach the highest or most crucial point’: • The church culminates in a steeple.

♦ Her rise in society culminated in her marriage to an earl.

♦ The word is very often used as though it were merely a synonym for result or conclude: • The growing unrest culminated in industrial action. This use is so widespread as to be generally accepted, although some careful users object to it.

The verb culminate is followed by the preposition in: • The rebellion culminated in civil war.

cult Some people dislike the adjectival use of the word cult to refer to a particular person, idea, activity, etc., that arouses great popular interest, especially for a short period of time: • a cult movie • a cult book • a cult figure. Care should be taken to avoid overusing the word in this way.

cultured or cultivated? Cultured and cultivated are almost synonymous in that they are both used to mean ‘educated, refined’. Cultured is particularly applied to education in terms of an understanding and appreciation of the arts: • They were cultured people who attended concerts and art galleries, while cultivated is applied to behaviour and speech: • He gradually dropped his Cockney twang and spoke in a soft, cultivated accent.

♦ Both cultured and cultivated also have connections with things that are produced artificially: • cultured pearls • cultivated plants.

Cumulative see ACCUMULATIVE or CUMULATIVE?

curb or kerb? These two spellings may sometimes be confused. Curb means ‘check or control’: • He curbed his anger. A kerb is the edge of a pavement in American English this word is spelt curb.

current or current? A current is a small seedless dried grape used in cookery: • She always put lots of currents in her cakes, or any of several different soft fruits: • redcurrent jam • blackcurrent juice. A current is a steady flow: • They did not swim because the current was very strong. • 250 volts, alternating current.

current The adjective current means ‘occurring in or belonging to the present time; presently existing or in progress’: • Current techniques for treating the disease are acknowledged to be inadequate and accepted or prevalent at this time: • The current opinions of American Catholics are in conflict with the Vatican.

♦ Current and currently are often used superfluously where there is no need to emphasize that
curriculum This word, meaning 'pro-
gramme of courses available or subjects
studied in a school or college'; • a wide-
ranging sixth-form curriculum • the National
Curriculum, is sometimes misspelt. Not
that the only double letters are -rr-, as in
current.
• A curriculum vitae, often abbreviated to CV, is a
summary of a person's career and qualifications
that is often required when applying for a job.
Vitae may be pronounced [vētē] or [vītēe].
curtsy or curtsey? The noun and verb
curtsy refer to a formal gesture made by a
girl or woman in which the head and
shoulders are lowered, the knees are bent
and the skirt is held outwards with both
hands: • She curtseyed to the Queen. The
alternative spelling curtsey is also accepta-
cable.
customer see client or customer?
cutting edge Some people dislike the
frequent use of the phrase cutting edge in
the figurative sense of 'forefront': • at the
cutting edge of information technology.
See also Leading-edge.
daisy This word, meaning ‘a raised platform’, is usually pronounced [days]. It was formerly pronounced as only one syllable [days], but this is now rarely heard.

daisycutter In cricket, a daisycutter is a ball rolled along the ground towards the batsman, but in modern US military slang it is used euphemistically to denote a type of bomb that is designed to explode a metre or so above the ground, causing maximum destruction.

Similar euphemisms used by the military to describe such weapons include bunker buster (modelled on the dambuster bomb of World War II).

dangling participles Participles are often used to introduce a phrase which is attached to a later-mentioned subject: • Startled by the noise she dropped her book. • Being by now very tired, we stopped at a pub. There is a tendency, though, for such introductory participles to become apparently attached to the wrong noun: • Startled by the noise, her book fell to the floor. • Being by now very tired, a pub was a welcome sight. It was not the book that was startled or the pub that was tired. Then there is the sentence where the participle appears to have no subject at all, which is the thought behind the term dangling participle (also known as unattached, or unrelated participle): • Lying in the sun, it felt as though it had always been summer. Who, or what, was lying in the sun?

Some participles are habitually used in a manner where they might be thought to dangle, but they are usually being used as prepositions or conjunctions, and such use is acceptable: • Speaking of fruit, does anyone want an apple? • Considering the odds against them, they did well. • Regarding your enquiry, I have pleasure in enclosing our catalogue. On the borderline is the increasingly popular use of having said that: • Having said that, the West Indies still look certain to win, which is considered unacceptable by many people.

dare The verb dare can be used in two different ways. It can be used as a full verb, followed by an infinitive with to: • I dare you to jump. • We'll see if she dares to contradict him; or it can be an auxiliary or modal verb, followed by an infinitive without to: • He dared not go there at night. • How dare you say that?

As an auxiliary the verb is only used in the forms dare and dared, and only in negative and interrogative constructions.

The expression dare say means ‘suppose, expect, or think likely’: • I dare say we’ll go to Bognor again. It is only used in the present tense and in the first person; and is sometimes written as one word: • I daresay.

dash Dashes can be used both singly and in pairs. Though the dash is useful, most of its functions can be performed by other punctuation marks, and excessive use of the dash is sometimes considered to be a mark of a careless writer. A sentence should never contain more than one dash or pair of dashes.

The double dash is used to mark a break in a sentence, very much in the same way as round brackets: • My mother - a Yorkshire-woman by birth - had little time for Londoners. As with parentheses, the material enclosed by dashes should be able to be removed leaving the sentence grammatically complete. Commas should not be used with double dashes.

A single dash is used to introduce a statement summarizing what has gone before: • Beer, chips, and cigarettes – these are the main threats to the nation’s health. It is also used to introduce an afterthought or a sharp change in subject or continuity: • I’m surprised to see Nigel here – he’s usually late. • You take two eggs – but perhaps you don’t even like omelettes? • I don’t believe it – caviare!

Dashes are used to indicate an unfinished sentence or hesitant speech: • I think he’s – • I – um – er – I don’t er – know. They are often used to precede the attribution of a quotation: • ‘No man
is an island" – Donne. They are, occasionally, used to indicate an omission of part of a name, and to replace all or part of an obscurity: • I travelled to the small mountain town of L— • It’s none of your —ng business. They are also used between points in space or time, where they are equivalent to to: • London–Paris • 1914–18.

A dash may be thought of as a less formal punctuation mark than a colon; • This word means ‘like a goat’ – Lloyd George was known as ‘the Goaf’. For dashes with colons see COLON.

data Data means ‘facts, information that can be used as a basis for analysis, etc.’: • We have data on road accidents for the past thirty years.

♦ Data is actually a plural, with the singular datum, but this singular is rarely used and data has come to be regarded as a collective noun, which is appropriate to its use for a body or aggregate of information. There is still considerable controversy as to whether it should take a singular or plural verb. In American English the singular verb is now usual: • This is essential data, and this use is becoming increasingly frequent in British English. However, some careful users (especially those working within scientific and medical circles) still insist on using the noun as a plural: • These are essential data.

The pronunciation [dætə] is preferred, although [dætə] is sometimes used and is usual in American English.

dates It is usual to write dates in figures, rather than words, except in some very formal contexts, such as legal documents. There are various ways of expressing dates: • 5 October 2003 is becoming the standard form in Britain in preference to 5th October, 2003 and October 5th, 2003. The standard form in the United States is October 5 2003.

♦ The abbreviated form 5:10:03 or 5/10/03 is acceptable in informal use but it should be used with caution as this abbreviation would mean the tenth of May in the United States, where the fifth of October would be abbreviated to 10:5:03, in at least one exceptional circumstance, however, the US version has become widely familiar everywhere in the world and is not reordered: • 9/11 (or 9-11, nine-eleven, nine-one-one), referring to the terrorist attacks on the United States that took place on 11 September 2001.

Centuries may be written as numbers or written out in full: • the 19th century or • the nineteenth century, and the abbreviation AD usually precedes the date, while BC follows it: • AD 527 • 1000 BC.

See also AD and BC.

The apostrophe in a series of years is nowadays generally omitted: • in the 1980s • the 1800s.

Specific years are usually rendered in numerical form. Sometimes a year date may be rendered in abbreviated form where the fuller form is felt to be unnecessary: • He died in the 14–18 war • If only we had known that back in ’39 • Let’s have another battle of ’47 Lafitte • Do you remember the summer of ’69? Another abbreviated form appears to be limited to the year 2000, marking the turn of the millennium: • Y2K (for ‘the year 2000’).

See also CENTURIES; NUMBERS; MILLENNIUM.

de- The prefix de- is used to signify ‘the opposite or reverse’: • declassify, removal: • decile, or ‘reduction’: • degrade.

♦ As a productive prefix, de- is constantly being used to create new words: • desegregate (to reverse a practice or law involving racial segregation), • de-escalate (to decrease in scope or extent), • deinstitutionalize (to release patients from an institution), • delet (to remove from a list of approved items), • demerger (the separation of previously merged companies). Some users object to the coming of such forms.

deadly or deathly? Deadly means ‘likely to cause death’; deathly refers to a characteristic of death: • a deadly weapon • a deathly silence. Deadly is sometimes used in place of deathly in figurative contexts: • 'Goodbye,' she said, with a deathly finality.

♦ Both words may be used adverbially: • deadly quiet • deathly pale. In informal contexts the adjective deadly can also mean ‘extremely boring’: • The party was deadly.

defa Because of its negative associations, and because there are many different degrees of hearing impairment, the word deaf is sometimes avoided by careful writers in general reference to people who have difficulties with their hearing. Preferred terms include hearing impaired: • This loop system is a great help to the hearing impaired. Similarly, those with perfect hearing may be termed hearing people.

See also PROFOUNDLY DEAF.

defa-mute This term, describing a person who cannot hear or speak, is no longer considered acceptable by many people, who prefer the less offensive alternative PROFOUNDLY DEAF.
The alternative deal-and-dumb is similarly considered old-fashioned and offensive as it may suggest that the person concerned is incapable of communication of any kind.

**deal** The verb deal, in the sense 'buy and sell', is followed by the preposition in: *They deal in antique furniture.* In the sense 'see to, tackle, look after' it is followed by with: *The police were called in to deal with the riot.*

**dear** and **deer** Dear variously means 'beloved', 'expensive', or 'appealing'; *This is my dear wife.* *The prices in that shop are very dear.* *What a dear little picture.* It should not be confused with deer, which denotes the animal.

* Both words are pronounced [deer].

**debris** This word, meaning 'rubble or remains'; *They removed the debris from the building site,* is stressed on the first syllable [ˈdɛbrid]. The variant pronunciation [ˈdɛbri] is widely used, and this pronunciation should be used when the word is written with an acute accent: *debris.*

**debut** Debut, meaning 'first appearance'; *He made his debut in a James Bond film,* may be pronounced [ˈdɛbɪt] or [ˈdɛbɪw]. If the word is spelt with an acute accent: *debut,* the first pronunciation should be used.

* The use of *debut* as a verb: *She debuted last month,* is disliked by many users.

**deca-** or **deci-**? The prefix deca- means 'ten times'; the prefix deci- means 'one tenth'; *decagon* *decibel.* A decametre is ten metres; a decimetre is one tenth of a metre.

* Note the difference in pronunciation, particularly the hard -c- [k] of deca- and the soft -c- [s] of deci-.

**decade** The word decade, denoting a period of ten years, is variously pronounced [ˈdɛkəd] or [ˈdɛkəd]. Either pronunciation may be used, although some people disapprove of the latter, more recent, version.

**deceitful** or **deceptive**? Both deceitful and deceptive imply misleading appearances or cheating. However, deceitful suggests an intention to deceive or mislead, even if not successful, and therefore carries negative moral overtones: *It was deceitful of you to pretend to be an orphan.* Deceptive applies to a misleading effect or result rather than dishonest motivation, and something might be unintentionally deceptive: *The ring's dull appearance was deceptive, for on closer inspection it turned out to be gold.*

**deceive** This word is often misspelt. Note the -ei- spelling, which conforms to the rule 'i before e except after c'.

* See also **spelling s**.

**decent** or **decorous**? Both these adjectives can mean 'socially acceptable': *decent/decorous behaviour.* Decorous, a formal word, is largely restricted to this sense, whereas decent has the additional meanings of 'not obscene', 'adequate', 'morally correct', 'obliging; pleasant', etc.: *decent language* *a decent meal* *to do the decent thing.* *He's a decent enough fellow.*

* In the sense of 'not obscene', decent is not as common as its opposite indecent ('obscene').

**deceptive** see **deceitful** or **deceptive**?

**deceptively** The adverb deceptively suggests misleading appearances and is used to indicate that something is not as suggested by the following adjective: *a semi-detached house offering deceptively spacious accommodation* (advertisement, Chichester Observer).

**dec-** see **deca-** or **deci-**?

**decidedly** or **decisively**? Decidedly usually means 'definitely; unquestionably': *It was a decidedly welcome suggestion.* It is also sometimes used to mean 'firmly; resolutely', and decisively is used in the same way: *I'm going ahead with it,* she said decidedly/decisively. Decisively is also used to imply decision-making which is marked by firmness, confidence, and lack of wavering: *He studied the options briefly before decisively choosing the second one.*

* Decisive can be applied to anything which makes a particular outcome inevitable: *a decisive goal* is the one that decides the result of the match; and decisively is also used in this sense; *Her conduct at the interview influenced the board decisively.*

**decimate** Decimate literally means 'destroy one in ten', from the Roman practice of killing every tenth soldier as a punishment for mutiny. The word is now used popularly to mean 'inflict considerable damage;
destroy a large part of: • The weather decimated today’s sports programme (BBC TV). This use probably arises from the mistaken belief that the word means ‘destroy all but a tenth’ and, although the usage is very widespread, many careful users still dislike it. Decimate should not be used to mean ‘annihilate totally’, or in such constructions as: • badly decimated • utterly decimated • Some 75 per cent of the cattle were decimated by the disease.

decisively see DECEDELY or DECISELY?
decolorize see COLOURIZE.
décor The noun décor, meaning ‘interior decoration’ or ‘stage decoration’, may be spelt with or without the acute accent in English. The pronunciation is [daykor] or [dèkor].

• The spelling décor and the pronunciation [daykor], being closer to the original French, are preferred by some users.

decorous see DECENT or DECOROUS?
decriminalize or legalize? These two verbs are virtually interchangeable in the sense of ‘make no longer illegal’: • to legalize [or decriminalize] the smoking of cannabis. Legalize is the more frequent, and is used in a wider range of contexts in the sense of ‘make legal’: • to legalize independent radio stations.

• The verb decriminalize emphasizes the former criminality of the practice to which it refers, and it may be more emotive than legalize: • He was an ardent supporter of the campaign to decriminalize homosexuality.

decry or descry? To decry an idea or plan is to criticize or denounce it strongly: • The report decried television news for concentrating on disaster and conflict. Descry is a formal word and is much rarer than decry. To descry something is to notice it, especially at a distance: • descry the coast on a clear day.

• Etymologically both decry and descry derive from Old French descrire, to proclaim or decry.

dedicated In technology, the word dedicated is applied to machines, parts, accessories, computer programs, etc., that are designed to fulfill a single specific function: • a dedicated word-processing package. The term is increasingly used in more general contexts: • Three companies gave their pro-

pals to the Commons select committee on broadcasting for a new dedicated parliamentary channel (The Guardian).

deduce or deduct? To deduce is to come to a logical conclusion; to deduct is to subtract: • I deduced that she was lying; • He deducted £10 from the bill. The two verbs have the derived noun deduction in common: • the deduction that she was lying • a deduction of £10.

deer see DEAR or DEER?
defacto The Latin phrase de facto refers to something that exists in actual fact, whether or not that is justified or was intended: • de facto recognition of the state’s independence.

• The literal meaning of the phrase is ‘in actual fact’. Note that it is sometimes written or printed in italics.

See also DE JURE.

defective or deficient? Defective means ‘having a fault; not working properly’: • The washing machine I bought yesterday turned out to be defective. Deficient means ‘having a lack’: • She sings well but her voice is deficient in power.

• While deficient can be applied to concrete as well as abstract nouns: • Your diet is deficient in calcium, it is not usually applied to manufactured objects. Defective is usually applied to concrete nouns, including manufactured objects, but can be applied to some abstract nouns, particularly those denoting some physical quality: • His colour vision is defective.

defence The noun defence: • the importance of the country’s defence, is spelt with an c in British English, while the adjective defensive is spelt with an s: • The players adopted a defensive strategy.

• In American English the noun is spelt with an s.

defensible or defensive? An opinion, idea, etc., that is defensible is one that is capable of being defended: • the most morally defensible method of calculating payment. Defensive is used more frequently and refers to things or actions that protect someone or something: • the strong defensive walls of the city. Defensive is also used to describe the behaviour of a person reacting to criticism and, in sports contexts, actions that prevent an opponent from scoring in a competition: • take up a defensive position.
defer

The verb defer is followed by the preposition to: • She deferred to our wishes.

deficient see defective or deficient?

defining clause see restrictive clause.

definite or definitive? These two words are sometimes confused, although their meanings are different. Definite means 'precise, exact, or unambiguous': • The rules draw a definite distinction between professionals and amateurs. Definitive means 'final; conclusive': • This is the definitive game in the tournament, and is frequently used in criticism in the sense of 'authoritative' to describe a work or performance that is unlikely to be improved on: • Painter has written the definitive biography of Proust. • Careful users avoid the vague use of definitive for emphasis: • He has a definite resemblance to Winston Churchill.

definite article see the.

definitely This word, meaning 'certainly': • He was definitely going to win, is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent error being the replacement of the second i with an a.

definitive see definite or definitive?

defuse or diffuse? To defuse is to remove the device that causes a bomb to explode; to diffuse is to spread: • The bomb was defused. • The light was diffused.

• The two verbs are sometimes confused, being similar in pronunciation: defuse is pronounced [defes] and diffuse is pronounced [difus]. The adjective diffuse, meaning 'widely spread', has a final s sound [difus].

The verb defuse is also used in figurative contexts, meaning 'make less tense': • The President hopes to defuse the current highly-charged atmosphere.

degree The phrase to a degree has two meanings, 'somewhat' and 'extremely': • The match was exciting to a degree. This may give rise to ambiguity, as in the above example: how exciting was the match?

• The use of the phrase in the sense of 'extremely' should be restricted to informal contexts.

• The phrases to a surprising/considerable/lessen/ etc, degree are often better replaced by a simple adverb, such as surprisingly/considerably/lessen/ etc. To what degree . . . ? may be replaced by How much . . . ? or To what extent . . . ?

defy The pronunciation of defy is either [dai] or [dei]. Although the former is widely used, the latter is the more traditional pronunciation.

démon The French phrase déja vu is used to refer to the feeling that one has already experienced a present situation: • As we came into the village we had a strange sense of déjà vu. In modern usage it may also describe something that is so often repeated it has become hackneyed and stale: • That style is so déjà vu.

• The literal meaning of déjà vu is 'already seen'. Its anglicized pronunciation is [daynu].

dejure The Latin phrase de jure refers to something that exists or is so by legal right: • the de jure leaders.

• The literal meaning of the phrase is 'by right'. Note that it is sometimes written or printed in italics. It is pronounced [dayooray] or [dayooray].

See also de facto.

delirious Note the spelling of this adjective, particularly the first two vowels -e- and -i-. The correct pronunciation is [di-lir-i-us], with the short [i] of squirrel, not [di-lir-i-us].

• Delirious is the adjective that derives from delirium, 'a confused mental state because one is suffering from a feverish illness' or 'a state of great excitement or happiness'.

deliver Some people dislike the intransitive use of the verb deliver in the sense of 'fulfil a promise or commitment': • The government has failed to deliver on tax cuts. • We don't just want people with good ideas; we want people who will deliver.

• This usage is derived from the very informal expression deliver the goods, which originated in American slang about 1850 and has the same meaning.

deliverance or delivery? Both these nouns are derived from the verb deliver. Deliverance specifically refers to the act of delivering from danger, captivity, evil, etc., and is used in formal or literary contexts; delivery is used in the many other senses of the verb: • to pray for deliverance • the delivery of a baby • postal deliveries • the delivery of a speech.
delusion see allusion, illusion or delusion²

demi-, hemi- or semi- All three prefixes mean ‘half’: • demigod • hemisphere • semicircle. Semi- is the most frequent, and may be used to form new words: • semi-professional • semi-independent. Hemi- is found in a number of scientific terms: • hemihydrate (a term used in chemistry) • hemiplegia (paralysis of one side of the body). Demi- is chiefly found in words of French origin: • demi-tasse (a small cup) • demilune (a crescent-shaped formation).

* The noun hemodemiemic (quaver, the name of a note in music that is one eighth of the length of a quaver, is the only word in English that makes use of all three prefixes.

demise The original meaning of demise was 'the transfer of an estate or of sovereignty', and because such a transfer was only very rarely the result of death, the word came to mean 'death': • We were sad to hear of the demise of your husband. This usage is formal and somewhat outdated.

* Demise can be used figuratively to mean 'the end of existence or activity': • The demise of the steel industry in Consett caused massive unemployment in the area. Its use to mean merely 'failure' or 'decline': • the demise of the cinema should be avoided.

demonstrable This word may cause problems with pronunciation. The most widely used pronunciation is [dɪˈməʊnɪstrəbəl] which is stressed on the second syllable. Some careful speakers prefer the traditional [dɪˈməʊnɪstrəbəl] which is stressed on the first syllable.

denote see connote or denote²

denouement This word, meaning 'final outcome': • the stunning denouement of the novel, may be spelt denouement or denouement. Note the u e vowels in the middle of the word.

* The usual pronunciation is [dɛnəʊmənt] although in American English the word may be stressed on the first or third syllables.

deny see refute or deny²

depend Depend means 'be contingent': • It depends on the weather, or 'be reliant': • They depend on Social Security. It is normally used with on or upon, except in certain constructions where it is the subject: • It depends whether I'm well enough. • It depends what you mean by socialism.

* This usage is widespread but disliked by some careful users who insist on the word on or upon following depend in all cases. The expression: • It all depends, as a complete utterance, is acceptable only in informal speech.

dependant or dependent? The adjective, meaning 'reliant', is spelt dependent: • industries that are dependent on North Sea gas • He is completely dependent on other people's help. The noun, meaning 'someone who relies on another person for financial support', is spelt dependent: • Apart from your children, do you have any dependants? The two are often confused, as in a leaflet for Exmoor Area Tourist Attractions: • But this freedom will remain largely dependent upon visitors respecting the life of the countryside.

* Note that in American English the noun dependant is often spelt dependent.

dependence or dependency? Either noun may be used to mean 'the state of being dependent', but dependence is the more frequent in this sense: • his dependence/dependency on his parents • her dependence/dependency on alcohol.

See also DEPENDANT or DEPENDENT?

* Dependency can also mean 'territory that is controlled by another nation': • one of Britain's dependencies. It cannot be replaced by dependence in this sense.

Note the spellings of the two words. The endings -ance and -ancy are American variants.

dependent see dependant or dependent²

deploy Deploy is a military term meaning 'organize troops or equipment so that they are in the most effective position': • the decision to deploy the Marines in the Middle East. Careful users object to the frequent use of the word with reference to any utilization or organization of resources: • It will be up to you to set ambitious revenue targets and then train, develop, and deploy your team-members to ensure that those targets are met and surpassed (Daily Telegraph).

deprecate or deprecate? Deprecate means 'express disapproval of': • She deprecated the Government's record on equal opportunities. Depreciate means 'reduce in value', where it is usually used intransi-
tively: • It depreciates by about £100 every year, and 'balit' or disparage': • He deprecie their attempts to talk English.

Depreciate is often used instead of depreciate in the sense of 'disparage' and is also extended to mean 'play down; show modestly'. This usage of depreciate is disliked by some people, although it is acceptable in the well-established use of self-deprecating. • Jewish humour tends to be ironic and self-deprecating.

deprived Deprived means 'having something taken away or withheld': • Brain damage can occur if a baby is deprived of oxygen during labour. It should properly be applied to things which were once possessed or would be possessed in normal circumstances, but the modern tendency is to connect it with basic necessities and rights. As an adjective it has become a vogue word often meaning little more than 'poor': • It is always the most deprived women, usually with housing problems or of low intelligence, who are involved (The Times).

derail Some people dislike the increasing use of the verb derail in a figurative sense: • The British Government . . . would not be allowed to see its presidency of the European Community to derail progress to greater political union or a 'social Europe' (The Guardian). This usage is best restricted to informal contexts.

de rigueur The French expression de rigueur means 'required by social custom': • Evening dress is de rigueur at the dinner.

• The literal meaning of de rigueur is 'of strictness', it is pronounced [de riger].

derivative or derisory? Derivative means 'expressing derision; mocking or scornful': • His speech was received with derisive mirth. Derisory means 'deserving derision': • It was a derisory performance.

• Derisory is used particularly in the sense of 'ridiculously inadequate; contemptibly small': • He was retired with a derisory pension (BBC Radio).

derived words Derived words are formed by adding fixed groups of letters at the beginning or end of another word. The noun sadness is derived from the adjective sad; the adjective readable is derived from the verb read; the adverb boldly is derived from the adjective bold; the noun membership is derived from the noun member.

• Sometimes the base form of the word changes in the derived form; the -y of happy, for example, changes to -ly in the derived forms happily and happiness.

New words are also formed by adding prefixes or inflectional endings, such as -s, -ed, -ing, -er, -est: • unhappy members: • reading: • louder.

Some derived words are more complex: • unhappily, for example, consists of the base form knowing and the suffixes -ing and -ly.

See also prefixes; suffixes.

descendant or descendent Descendant is a noun meaning 'someone descended from a particular ancestor': • She was a descendant of the fourth duke. It should not be confused with the adjective descendent, which describes something moving downwards: • The aeroplane continued in a descendent arc towards the hills.

• Both words are pronounced [də'se̞nt].

describe see DECRY or DESCRY?

deselect The verb deselect, referring to an MP who is not selected for re-election, is one of a number of new words formed with the prefix de-: • a number of Labour MPs have been deselected by their local constituency parties.

desert or dessert? These words are sometimes confused. Desert is the last course of a meal (see DESSERT, SWEET, PUDDING or AFTERS?); • a deliciously sweet dessert; • a dessert spoon. Desert is used in all other contexts: • the Sahara desert; • She got her just deserts; • a deserted city.

• The verb desert is often followed by the preposition from: • He deserted from his regiment.

As a noun, desert is usually pronounced [dezət]; as a verb (or in the noun phrase just desserts) it is pronounced [dɪˈzɜːt]. Dessert is pronounced [dɪˈzɜːt].

desiccated This word, meaning 'dried'; • desiccated coconut, is sometimes misspelt. Note the single s and -cc.

• It is worth remembering the Latin words de and siccare, meaning 'to dry', from which the word originates.

design see INVENT, DESIGN or DISCOVER?

designer Designer has become a vogue adjective applied to clothes and other
manufactured goods which are produced by a well-known company with a reputation for fashionable design: • designer jeans •
  designer watches • He won’t wear anything without a designer label.
  • The use has been extended to mean `chic; trendy’ and is applied, sometimes jocularly, to
  anything that is in fashion: • designer stubble (a fashionably unshaven appearance) • designer
  water (mineral water) • The arrival of the designer salad has increased our enthusiasm for French
  dressing (Sunday Times). • . . as the world gets
  the first glimpse of the light, rosy designer
  terminal at Gatwick airport (The Guardian) •
  Designer Nazis rise on the tide of German fear
  (headline, Sunday Times).

**desirable or desireous?** Desirable means
‘worth desiring or having’: • a desirable
residence • Confrontation with the union is
not desirable at this stage. Desirous, which
means ‘desiring; wanting’, is a more formal
adjective, usually placed after the verb and
followed by of: • to be desirous of peace • The
president is desirous of your opinion. The two
adjectives should not be confused.

desk dining This is a contemporary busi-
ness term describing the practice of eating
meals at one’s workstation or desk in order
to continue working uninterrupted: • We
discourage desk dining in this office. As a
vogue term, desk dining is considered jargon-
istic by many people and is best re-
stricted to informal contexts.
  See also DRESS-DOWN DAY; DUVET DAY; HOT
  DESHING.

**despair or desperation?** The noun despair
means ‘loss of hope’: • a feeling of utter
despair • She gave up in despair. The noun
desperation is often applied to a reckless act
that results from despair: • In desperation he
jumped out of the window.
  • Note the spelling of desperation, particularly the
second -e-, which is sometimes wrongly replaced
with the -a- of despair.

**despatch or dispatch?** Both of these spell-
ings are acceptable for the verb meaning
‘send quickly’ or the noun meaning ‘mes-
sage or report’: • The letter was immedi-
ately despatched/dispatched. • The despatch/dis-
patch arrived that afternoon.

**desperate** This word, meaning ‘having no
hope’: • a desperate man • a desperate
situation, is sometimes misspelt. The mid-
dle part of the word is spelt per, not par as
in separate.

**desperation see DESPAIR or DESPERATION?**

**despicable** Despicable, meaning ‘contemp-
table’: • It was a despicable act, is usually
stressed on the second syllable [dɪˈspɪkəl].
Careful users, however, prefer the tradi-
tional pronunciation with the stress on the
first syllable [dɪˈspɪkəl].

**despite or in spite of?** Despite and in spite
of are completely interchangeable: • De-
spite/in spite of his injury, his playing was
superb. In spite of is used rather more
frequently, although despite has the advan-
tage of brevity.
  • Despite needs no preposition; despite of is
incorrect, and it is never necessary to precede
either despite or in spite of with but.

**dessert, sweet, pudding or afters?** The
question of how the sweet (usually) last

  course of a meal is referred to in Britain is
not fixed. Usage not only varies slightly
from one individual, family, etc., to an-
other, but also is probably currently chan-
ging. Generally, dessert is found in both
spoken and written contexts: • For dessert
we were offered ice cream and fruit. Sweet is
more informal, is found in spoken English,
and is considered by some middle- and
upper-class people to be unacceptable. Such
users prefer the word pudding, but this may
be becoming slightly old-fashioned to refer
generally to the last course of a meal. Afters
is used in very informal spoken English: •
What’s for afters, Mum?
  • Pudding has a number of other culinary senses,
  it may refer to a cooked sweet or savoury dish
  containing flour, eggs, etc.: • treacle pudding
  • Yorkshire pudding, or to a sausage-like savoury
  preparation • black pudding. These connotations
  may make it seem an inappropriate term for a light
  dessert, such as ice cream or fruit.
  Dessert traditionally denotes a course of fruit,
dates, nuts, etc., served at the end of a meal.
  See also DESSERT or DESSERT?

**destined** Destined means ‘being deter-
mined or intended in advance; directed
  towards, or having a particular purpose or
end’: • She believed her son was destined
to be the Messiah. • The convict ship was
  destined for Australia.
desultory

• Some people object to the use of destined as a synonym for intended, with no suggestion of destiny. The use of was destined to be to mean 'later became': • He was destined to be prime minister is also disliked. However, these uses are well-established and generally acceptable.

desultory This word, meaning 'unmethodical', should be stressed on the first syllable [des-ul'ter-].

detach The verb detach, meaning 'separate', is often misspelt, the most frequent error being the substitution of -ch for the -tch ending.

detract or distract? Distract means 'take away from; diminish' and is usually used figuratively to describe the diminishing of some desirable quality: • The new hotels can only detract from the resort's charm. Distract means 'take one's mind off something; divert attention elsewhere': • I tried to concentrate but I was distracted by the noise outside.

detrimental The adjective detrimental is followed by the preposition to: • Smoking is detrimental to health.

development Since Third World countries have been referred to as underdeveloped countries, and then less-developed countries, least-developed countries, or developing countries, the word development has come to have a specialized meaning in terms of the economic growth and improvements in living conditions of these countries: • the World Development Movement • The rich world need provide only $1 billion a year in development assistance (Ronald Siders, Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger).

• Note the spelling: there is no e after the p.

Note that while more developed countries are frequently referred to as belonging to the First World, and less-developed or least-developed countries (LDCs) are commonly said to belong to the Third World, the phrase Second World, describing the former countries of the Communist bloc, is rarely used today and is not likely to be understood without explanation.

device or devise? These words are sometimes confused. Device is a noun meaning 'contrivance or gadget': • a device for opening bottles, or 'scheme or ploy': • It was a cunning device to get his own way. Devise is a verb meaning 'plan': • They devised a new method of classifying the books.

• Note that devise is one of the few verbs that cannot be spelt -ize; see also -ize or -ise?

devoid The adjective devoid is followed by the preposition of: • The landscape is devoid of interesting features.

devolve on or devolve to? The verb devolve, meaning 'pass to' or 'transfer', may be followed by either on or to and little distinction is made between the two in general modern usage. Careful users, however, reserve devolve on for the transfer of powers or authority, etc., and use devolve to when referring to the passing of a right or benefit to someone: • The power to impose tax will devolve on local government bodies. • The property will devolve to her surviving relatives.

devotee The noun devotee, meaning 'enthusiast', 'supporter', or 'follower', is sometimes mispronounced. The correct pronunciation is [devotē], with the stress on the last syllable. The first two syllables rhyme with clever: they do not have the same vowel sounds as the verb devote.

dexterous or dextrous? This word, meaning 'skilful or nimble': • a dextrous artisan, may be spelt dexterous or dextrous although the former is the more frequently used spelling.

• Note that ambidextrous is always spelt without the extra e.

diagnosis or prognosis? Both diagnosis and prognosis are most often used in medical contexts. A diagnosis is the identification of a disease, from studying the symptoms: • The doctor's diagnosis, based on her spots, was chicken-pox. A prognosis is a forecast of the likely course of an illness and the prospect of recovery: • The doctor's prognosis is that he will never fully regain his eyeglass.

• Both diagnosis and prognosis can be used of problems in general, with the meanings, respectively, of 'an analysis of the cause of the problem' and 'a forecast of the course and outcome of a problem': • They diagnosed a major fault in the wiring. His prognosis indicated that the company was heading for bankruptcy.

The plural of both nouns is formed by changing the -sis ending to -ses: • diagnoses • prognoses.
**dialect** Dialect usually refers to an established variety of a language, confined either to a region or to a social group or class. ♦ The dialect used by educated middle- or upper-class people is often regarded as the standard form of a language and other dialects as nonstandard (see PRONUNCIATION). At one time nonstandard regional dialects were considered a handicap to acceptance in 'civilized' English society; regional accents have now gained wide acceptance, for example among BBC announcers, although nonstandard grammar or vocabulary is still considered unacceptable.

Dialect is seen not only in pronunciation: vocabulary, grammar, and sentence construction vary too. Compare the Northern English: • He'll not be coming with the Southern: • He won't be coming, or the North-East English: • You suit that dress with the standard: • That dress suits you. An example from William Trevor shows the Irish use of the for as: • Well, Brian, isn't that the grand outfit you have on?' (The Ballroom of Romance). Social dialects are often associated with the working-class dropping of h's, use of double negatives, and so on, but upper-class cultures have their own dialect forms too.

There is a wealth of dialect words. Often the same word has different meanings in different regions. Canny means 'thrifty or shrewd' in Scotland, but 'pleasant or agreeable' in North-East England.

dialectal or dialectic? Dialectal is an adjective, meaning 'relating to dialect': • a dialectal term. Dialectic is a noun, meaning 'disputation'; it has a number of specialized uses in logic and philosophy.

♦ Dialectic is also a variant of the adjective dialectical, meaning 'relating to dialect'.

dialogue Dialogue is now rarely used for an ordinary conversation between two or more people, but is increasingly applied to exchanges of opinion and high-level negotiation between organizations and individuals who are usually ideologically opposed or have a conflict of interest: • We must bring about meaningful dialogue between management and unions. • It is hoped that military conflict can be avoided through international dialogue.

♦ Dialogue is used as a verb in American English: • We must dialogue with each other, but this use is not generally acceptable in British English.

diaphragm A diaphragm is a separating membrane and especially refers to the partition that separates the chest from the abdomen. The word also refers to a contraceptive device. In spelling, note the ph and the silent g.

diariize Some people dislike the verb diariize, meaning 'write in one's diary', as an example of the increasing tendency to coin new verbs by adding the suffix -ize to nouns and adjectives: • to diariize one's appointments.

See also -ize or -ise.

diarrhoea This word is often misspelt. Note particularly the -rh- and also the -oea ending.

♦ in American English the -o- is usually omitted.

See also -AE- and -OE-

dice Dice was originally the plural form of a singular noun die, but this singular form is now almost never used in British English except in the expression: • The die is cast. Dice is now used both as a singular and as a plural: • He made a dice out of a sugar cube. • You need two dice for that game.

♦ The word is also used for a gambling game played with dice: • I cannot believe that God plays dice with the cosmos' (Albert Einstein).

The word dice may also be applied generally to cube-shaped pieces of something: • Next place the parsnip dice in a saucepan of boiling water.

dichotomy A dichotomy is a division of two things which are sharply contrasted, especially if they are mutually exclusive, contradictory, or irreconcilably different: • the dichotomy between Christianity and atheism. It has become a vogue word used generally to mean 'conflict, split, schism, or difference': • A new dichotomy is developing in the Church of England. This usage is disliked by some people, both for its lack of precision and for its pretentiousness.

♦ The usual pronunciation of dichotomy is [di-kot-ə-mə], with the long i of die.

die The verb die is followed by the preposition of or from: • Thousands died of [or from] starvation during the drought. • He died from his wounds.

dietician or dietitian? A person who studies the principles of nutrition is known as a dietician or dietitian. Both spellings of the word are perfectly acceptable.

♦ Note that the science itself is called dietetics.
difference or differentiation? Difference and differentiation differ slightly in meaning and cannot be used as synonyms for each other. Difference means ‘dissimilarity’, while differentiation denotes the process of becoming dissimilar. • There are several marked differences between the two machines.

• Scientists have followed the differentiation of the two species over several decades.

different from, different to or different than? It is possible to follow different with from, to, or than. Different from is the most frequently used form and the most acceptable: • Your life is different from mine. Different to is often used in informal British English: • That suit is different to this one. It is, however, disliked by some people and not used in American English. Different than is in frequent use in American English but is disliked by many users of British English and generally should be avoided.

• Different than is considered most acceptable when followed by a clause: • My values now are different than they were when I was a teenager, as it removes the need for clumsy phrases such as: • from those that I had.

differential Differential, as adjective and noun, is a term in mathematics and has the nontechnical meanings of ‘based on a difference; a difference between comparable things’. It is now most frequently used in reference to differences in pay rates for various jobs in the same industry, based on differences in skills, work conditions, etc.: • Pay differentials between nursing and administrative staff have widened.

• The use of differential in place of difference: • a differential of £20 a week is inappropriate, as a differential is a discrepancy based on related differences, not the difference itself.

differentiation see DIFFERENCE or DIFFERENTIATION

differently abled see ABLE.

different than, different to see DIFFERENT FROM, DIFFERENT TO OR DIFFERENT THAN

diffuse see DEFUSE or DIFFUSE

digital The adjective digital, meaning ‘storing information as numbers or electronic signals’, has specific technical uses in computing, sound recording, and broadcasting: • digital superhighway • digital recording • digital television. Digital also refers to the presentation of information in the form of digits rather than pointers on a dial or scale: • digital watch • digital display • digital thermometer.

dilapidated This word, meaning ‘falling into ruin’: • a dilapidated cottage, is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent mistake being to begin the word with de-, rather than the correct di-.

dilemma A dilemma is a situation where one is faced with two equally unsatisfactory alternatives: • It was a hopeless dilemma – she could stay with her husband and be miserable, or she could leave him and lose the children.

• It is usually considered acceptable to use dilemma when more than two choices are involved, provided they are equally unattractive, but one should not use dilemmas for desirable things: • His mouth watered as he pondered the dilemma of whether to choose the chocolate soufflé or the pistachio ice cream. Dilemma is often used to mean just ‘a problem’, where there is open choice or no element of choice at all: • the dilemma of what to wear • the dilemma of how to attract new members. Careful users dislike this imprecise use of the word.

The -i of dilemma may be short [dlima] or long [dli:mə]. The first of these pronunciations is preferred by some users.

dimension The literal uses of dimension are concerned with measurement, dimensions being also used figuratively to mean ‘scope or extent’: • They were now in a position to assess the dimensions of the tragedy. The word is also fashionably used as a synonym for aspect or factor: • The fact that one of the applicants was black and one a woman added a new dimension to their decision.

• Some people dislike the overuse of the nonliteral senses of this word.

diminution This word means ‘decrease in size, intensity, etc.’: • the possible diminution in readers. Note the spelling and the pronunciation [diminju:ʃən].

dingy or dingy? These words are sometimes confused. A dingy is a small boat; dingy is an adjective meaning ‘gloomy or shabby’: • a dingy basement flat.

• Dingy is pronounced with a hard g [ding] or [dɪŋ]. The pronunciation of dingy is [dɪŋ].
dining room see Lounge.

dinky Dinky, an acronym of 'dual (or "double") income, no kids', is used with reference to a childless couple earning above-average salaries. The final -y is sometimes interpreted as 'yet'.

- Of American origin, the acronym is one of many contrived in the 1980s and 1990s to identify perceived categories of society (see also NIMBY; YUPPIE). Most are now considered outdated, although similar new coinages such as yeetie (young, entrepreneurial, technology-based) continue to appear sporadically.

There is also the British adjective dinky, 'pretty; neat'.

Dinner, lunch, tea or supper? The question of how meals and mealtimes are referred to in Britain is fraught with class and regional considerations. In general, middle- and upper-class people have their main meal in the evening and call it dinner or supper; lunch is taken around midday and is usually a light meal or snack, although Sunday lunch may be the main meal of the day. Tea (or afternoon tea), if it is taken, is eaten late in the afternoon and consists of small sandwiches and cakes. High tea is a meal eaten in the late afternoon rather than dinner or supper later in the evening. Some people, especially those living in Northern England and Scotland, have dinner at midday, while tea is a substantial meal eaten at about six o'clock. Supper is always the last meal of the day and is sometimes a light bedtime snack for those who have had a large tea, or it can be the main evening meal for those who choose not to call the main evening meal dinner or tea.

See also Lunch or Luncheon?

diphtheria This word causes problems with spelling and pronunciation. Note the phth in the spelling. The ph sound is pronounced f by careful users [dɪfθəˈriə] or p [dɪfθəˈriə]

diphthong Note the phth in the spelling. The ph sound is pronounced f by careful users [dɪfθɔŋ] or p [dɪfθɔŋ].

direct speech Direct speech is a record of the actual words used by a speaker. These words are usually enclosed in Quotation Marks and followed or preceded by a verb such as said, whispered, shouted, etc.: • 'Get out!' he cried. • She replied, 'I don't know'.

See also reported speech.

- In passages of conversation, the words of different speakers are often placed in separate paragraphs. The verbs that follow or precede the direct speech are sometimes omitted once the identity of the speakers has been made clear.

dis- or dys-? Confusion between these two prefixes can cause spelling mistakes. Dis- is the more frequent, indicating lack, reversal, negation, removal, etc.: • disagreement • discontinue • dissimilar. Dys- means 'abnormal', 'faulty', 'difficult', or 'bad' and is chiefly found in technical words relating to physical or mental problems: • dyspepsia • dylexia • dysfunction.

disabled Disabled is the preferred word in both British and American English for people with physical or mental disabilities, replacing handicapped, crippled, defective, etc.: • He was disabled as the result of an accident at work. • I believe from personal experience of having a disabled mother that it is not disabled friendly and we will look at it. (Bucks Herald).

- As preferred terms in sensitive areas such as disability tend to change, some users now consider even disabled unacceptable and prefer such terms as person with disabilities, differently abled, or physically challenged.

See also ACCESSIBLE; PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

disadvantaged Like underprivileged and deprived, disadvantaged has become a fashionable euphemism for 'poor', with particular emphasis on the lack of a reasonable standard of housing, living conditions, and opportunities for gaining basic rights: • Up to 100 teachers from each country are to spend one or two months studying such matters as how to motivate disadvantaged children (The Times).

disappear Note the spelling of this word, particularly the single -s- and the -pp-.

disappoint The verb disappoint and its derivatives are often misspelt, the most frequent error being the doubling of the -s-. Note also the -pp-.

disassemble see ASSEMBLE or DISASSEMBLE?

disassociate see ASSOCIATE or DISASSOCIATE?
disassociation or dissociation? Disassociation and dissociation are close in meaning, denoting the separation of two things, persons, or concepts: • She has completed the process of disassociation from all her old friends. • The party's disassociation from the affair has not been entirely successful. The two words are, however, not always exact synonyms of each other; in psychology and psychiatry, disassociation specifically denotes the separation of emotions as a defence mechanism: • As an adult he protected himself through disassociation from this childhood trauma.

disastrous This word is sometimes mis-spelt. Note that the e of disaster is dropped before the suffix -ous is added.
• In pronunciation careful users avoid sounding the e of disaster; [disuhstrəs] rather than [dizuhstrəs].

The overuse of this word, to describe something very bad in its performance or results, is disliked by many.

disc or disk? These spellings are sometimes confused. A disc is a flat round or circular shape: • a slipped disc • compact disc. In American English this word is usually spelt disk. In British English disk is reserved for use in computer science, to describe a thin plate on which data is stored: • a floppy disk. This is occasionally spelt disc.

discipline Note the c following the s in the spelling of this word.

dicoloration see coloration.

discomfit or discomfort? There is some overlap between these words and often confusion as to the distinction between them. Discomfit means 'defeat or thwart': • He discomfited his opponent, and 'disconcert, confuse, or embarrass': • They were discomfited by his strange manner. Discomfort means 'make uncomfortable or uneasy'. This might be physical distress: • The hard seats discomfited her, or mental uneasiness, in which case the distinction between discomfort and discomfit often becomes blurred: • His ominous tone discomfited them.

• Discomfit is both a verb and a noun, but the noun from discomfit is discomfiture.

discover see invent, design or discover?

discreet or discrete? These two words are sometimes confused. Discreet means 'judicious or prudent': • You can confide in him; he is very discreet; discrete means 'separate or distinct': • discrete elements in the composition.

discrepancy or disparity? Both these nouns mean 'difference'. A discrepancy is a difference between things that should be the same; a disparity is a greater difference that suggests imbalance or inequality: • We'd better serve the Bordeaux because Paul is discriminating when it comes to wine. Discriminatory is now almost always applied to discrimination that is unjust and based on prejudice: • Feminists are organizing a boycott of the bank because of its discriminatory practices.

disinterested or uninterested? Disinterested means 'impartial; having no self-interest': • As a disinterested party he felt free to intervene in the dispute. Uninterested means 'having no interest; indifferent; bored': • I was quite uninterested in their holiday photos.

• Perhaps because uninterested is not in frequent use, disinterested is now often used in its place to mean 'lacking interest', which was, in fact, the original meaning of disinterested: • Charles, in turn, appeared cold and disinterested in his wife (Sunday Times). However, its use in this sense is objected to by many people: • 'It was nothing but copying documents and tedious things like that, canceled checks and invoices, little chits of things. I've never been so disinterested.' Mason stirred and said, 'Don't you mean uninterested?' (Anne Tyler, The Accidental Tourist).

disk see disc or disk?

disorganized or unorganized? Either adjective may be used in the sense of 'not organized'. As the past participle of the verb disorganize, disorganized specifi-
ally refers to something organized that has been thrown into confusion, but it is also used in a general informal sense: • I'm a bit disorganized this morning. Unorganized is more neutral and less frequent: • an unorganized method of working.

disorient or disorientate? Disorient and disorientate are interchangeable and mean 'cause to lose bearings or sense of identity; confuse': • They had organized a one-way traffic system since his last visit and he was completely disoriented/disorientated. • After years of being institutionalised she was disoriented/disorientated after her discharge. Disorient is preferred by some users as the shorter and simpler alternative; it is also the standard form in American English, while disorientate is more frequently used in British English.

See also ORIENT or ORIENTATE?

disparity see DISCREPANCY or DISPARITY?

dispassionate, impassioned or impassive? The adjectives dispassionate and impassive are sometimes confused because of their similarity in meaning; impassioned and impassive because of their similarity in form. Dispassionate means 'not influenced by emotion; objective', whereas impassive means 'showing no emotion': • a dispassionate assessment of the problem • She remained impassive, ignoring his cries. Impassioned means 'full of passion': • an impassioned attack on the government.

dispatch see DESPATCH or DISPATCH?

dispel or disperse? Dispel means 'scatter; drive away' and is often used for abstract things: • He allowed them to see the original document so as to dispel their doubts about its authenticity. Disperse means 'break up': • The family were dispersed over Europe, spread over a wide area: • The gas dispersed over half the town, and 'dissipate, evaporate, or vanish': • The mist had now dispersed and visibility was normal.

dispute The noun dispute may be pronounced with the stress on the first syllable [di'spwt] or the second [dis'pwt]. The first of these pronunciations is becoming increasingly frequently heard, although it is disliked by many users.

• The verb dispute is always stressed on the second syllable.

dissect This word, meaning 'separate or cut up for analysis', is spelt with -sect, unlike biect.

• Although dissect is often pronounced to rhyme with biect [di'sekt], careful users prefer [di'sekt].

disable or disassemble? Dissemble, a literary word, means 'pretend' or 'conceal'; disassemble means 'take apart': • He dissembled his excitement. • She disassembled the machine. The two verbs should not be confused.

• Note the spellings of the words, particularly the -s- and -ss-.

dissimulate or simulate? The verbs dissemble and dissimulate, both of which are formal, mean 'pretend not to have; conceal'; simulate means 'pretend to have; feign': • to dissemble [or dissimulate] one's anger • to simulate enthusiasm.

See also SIMULATE or STIMULATE?

dissension or dissent? The noun dissen-
sion refers to a state of disagreement, discord, or conflict: • The proposal caused much dissension. The noun dissent, the opposite of assent, means 'difference of opinion'; it refers to the act of disagreeing or an expression of disagreement: • a voice of dissent.

• Confusion between the two nouns may lead to the misleading of dissension, with -s- in place of the third -s-.

dissimilar The adjective dissimilar is followed by the preposition from or to: • The flavour is not dissimilar from [or to] that of chicken.

dissimulate see DISSEMBLE, DISSIMULATE or SIMULATE?

dissociate or disassociate? Dissociate and disassociate are interchangeable opposites of associate: • One of the committee members told me after the meeting that she wished to dissociate/disassociate herself from what the chair had said.

• Most careful users prefer the form disassociate.

dissociation see DISSOCIATION or DISSOCIA-
tion?

distil In British English the verb distil ends in a single l, which is doubled before a suffix beginning with a vowel: • distillery.

• The American English spelling of the verb is distill.

See also SPELLING 1.
distinct or distinctive? These two adjectives are frequently confused although they are not interchangeable. Distinct means ‘definite; clearly perceivable or distinguishable’; • There’s a distinct taste of garlic in this stew. Distinctive means ‘characteristic, peculiar to, distinguishing’; • He had the distinctive rolling gait of a sailor.

distact see DETRACT or DISTRACT?

distribute The traditional pronunciation in British English of this word, meaning ‘share out’ or ‘spread’, is [distrɪbjuːt], with the stress on the second syllable. The alternative pronunciation [distrɪˈbjuːt], with the stress on the first syllable, has, however, become equally acceptable in both British and American English.

distrust or mistrust? Distrust and mistrust are often used interchangeably. • Somehow I distrust/mistrust the whole business. Distrust is more frequently used and has a far more emphatic suggestion of suspicion and lack of trust: • I have known him to be deceitful in the past and I have come to distrust everything he says. Mistrust is rather more tentative and is used for a less positive lack of trust or when the doubt is directed against oneself: • There was something about her manner that made me uneasy and I found myself beginning to mistrust her. • I tend to mistrust my critical judgment when it comes to my own writing.

disturb or perturb? Disturb can mean ‘interrupt; inconvenience’: • His reserve was disturbed by a ring at the doorbell. • I hope I’m not disturbing you by phoning so late, ‘throw into disorder’: • The cleaner had disturbed all her papers, and ‘upset; destroy the mental composure of’: • I was deeply disturbed by this revelation. In this last use, disturb is virtually synonymous with the less frequently used word perturb, which means ‘cause disquiet to; cause mental disturbance’: • His violent language and abrupt departure had perturbed her.

dived or dove? In British English the past tense of dive is almost always dived: • They all dived for cover. However, the past tense dove exists in some British dialects and is the standard form in several regions of the United States and Canada: • She dove beautifully, and a moment later she was swimming back to the side of the pool (Philip Roth, Goodbye Columbus).

do Do is used as an informal replacement for various different verbs, for example ‘prepare’: • Shall I do you a sandwich?, ‘clean’: • I’m just going to do my teeth, ‘visit’: • We’re doing the British Museum tomorrow, ‘perform’: • The local rep are doing The Cherry Orchard, ‘study’: • She’s doing maths at Cambridge, ‘provide’: • Do they do breakfast?

divorcee A divorced person of either sex is known as a divorcee [dɪˈvɔːs]. A divorced man is also called a divorcé [diˈvɔːs] or [diˈvɔːs], and a divorced woman is also called a divorcee [dɪˈvɔːs].

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do is used as an auxiliary verb in questions: • Do you like it?, in negative sentences: • They don’t want to go, and for emphasis: • I do wish he’d phone!

The construction do have in British English (probably under the influence of American English) is often used in questions and negative statements as an alternative to have got: • Do you have the new edition of this? • Do we have his reply yet? • We don’t have time to wait. In such contexts, some users find do have more acceptable than have got, although both are equally correct grammatically.

document Document is used as a verb to mean ‘provide documentary evidence or information to act as factual support’: • His essay was well documented with authoritative references. It is also used in reference to the production of a written, filmed, or broadcast work that has plentiful detailed factual information: • The programme documents life in a women’s prison.
Domestay or doomsday? The Domestay Book is the survey of England carried out during the reign of William I. The noun doomsday, sometimes spelt with a capital D-., means Judgment Day; Last Judgment in the Christian religion, and 'day of reckoning' or 'end of the world' in general usage. The phrase till doomsday means 'for ever': you can wait till doomsday, but I won't change my mind.

- Both words are pronounced [doo-estay].

dominate or domineer? To dominate means 'rule, exert power or control over': her charm and energy were such that she came to dominate the whole company. It can also mean 'occupy a preeminent position': our products dominate the pet-food market, and 'overlook from a superior height': the church is built on a hill and dominates the town. Dominate is often used in a negative way that would be better reserved for domineer which means 'tyrannize, exert power in an arbitrary or overbearing manner'. It is most frequently used as a present participle that functions as an adjective: his cruel domineering manner.

done or finished? Both done and finished signify completing something: everything's been done. The race has finished. Some users prefer finished to done in formal contexts, preferring I have finished with the computer to I'm done with the computer.

doomstep see DOMESTAY or DOOMSDAY?

doorstep The verb doorstep is disliked by some people as an example of the increasing tendency to use nouns as verbs. It originally referred to the practice of selling door-to-door, then to the practice of canvassing door-to-door, and later to the practice (favoured by investigative journalists, press photographers, etc.) of waiting outside the house or office of somebody in the public eye and accosting that person when he or she appears.

do's and don'ts In the phrase do's and don'ts, note that the apostrophe in don't comes after the n and not after the t. The apostrophe in do's is sometimes omitted.

dot.com The phrase dot.com refers to a commercial computer website or company operating through the Internet, the origin of the phrase being the .com ending of many website addresses. Though widely understood, dot.com should be avoided in formal contexts. It is increasingly spelt as one word: he works for one of the new dot.com outfits.

- The phrase dot.com has inspired a host of subsidiary phrases relating to computer-based business, often with a hyphen in the place of the full stop: dot.com millionaire dot.commer dot-comback.

double entendre The French expression double entendre refers to an ambiguous word or phrase, one of whose meanings has indecent connotations.

- The literal meaning of double entendre is 'double meaning'; it is pronounced [doo-ble on-tendr].

double negative The double negative, as in: I didn't do nothing. He hasn't had no tea, is always avoided by careful users. The objection to such constructions is that the negatives cancel each other out and reverse the meaning of the sentence. When two negatives are intended to cancel each other: She is not without talent. It is not impossible, they are, however, acceptable. Another generally acceptable, if colloquial, use is in such sentences as: I shouldn't be surprised if it doesn't snow.

The cruder double negative is not difficult to avoid. It is more likely to occur with the semi-negative adverbs hardly, scarcely, barely: They were left for hours without hardly any food, or in complex sentences where the various negative words and phrases might get muddled: despite his injury, he denied that it was unlikely that he would not play again this season.

The word neither should not be used in sentences that are already negative: I'm not hungry and I'm not thirsty neither. I didn't neither.

double whammy A double whammy is a double blow, or any problem or difficulty that has a two-pronged effect: we have been hit by a double whammy; a cut of £30 million below meagre expectations . . . and major cost increases for equipment and international subscriptions following the devaluation of sterling (Daily Telegraph).

- The term whammy, meaning 'devastating blow', has been used in American English since the 1940s, where it originally (in the Li'l Abner cartoon strip) referred to the evil eye: the use of on eye is a whammy; the use of both, only in an emergency, is a double whammy. On the same model, a situa-
doubling of consonants

The general rule of doubling consonants in such words as: • drop – dropped • refer – referred, see individual entries and SPELLING 1.

doubt The main problem with doubt is what preposition or conjunction to use with it. When doubt is used as a noun it is most often followed by about: • I have my doubts about it, but it can be followed by that in a negative construction: • There is no doubt in my mind that he is telling the truth. When doubt is used as a verb it can only be followed by that in negative constructions: • I don’t doubt that you are right, and in most other constructions it is followed by whether: • They doubted whether he would be welcome.

♦ If it’s a possible alternative to whether but it is suitable for more informal use: • I doubt if I can make it.

doubtful or dubious? Both doubtful and dubious mean ‘giving rise to doubt, uncertain, questionable’ and they are often more or less interchangeable: • They were doubtful/dubious whether the car was safe. Doubtful is more neutral and is more likely to be used when expressing uncertainty: • The eventual result remains doubtful. Dubious carries more negative overtones and is often used to suggest a suspicion that a person or practice is underhand or dishonest in some way: • He was involved with some dubious export company.

♦ Doubtful is always preferable in constructions stating it is: • It is doubtful whether he has ever actually visited Germany.

doubtless see undoubtedly.

douse or douse? Either spelling of this verb may be used in the sense of ‘soak’ or ‘extinguish’, pronounced [dəʊs]. Douse is the more frequent: • doused with petrol • to douse a candle. The verb douse, in the additional meaning ‘search for water using a divining rod’ and pronounced [dəʊz], should never be spelt douse.

dove see DIVED or DOVE?

download and upload Download and upload are both computer terms that have been absorbed to some extent into the English language to denote the copying or transfer of information, data, etc. Download refers to the transfer of data from a larger computer or other information system, while upload denotes the opposite: • He downloaded the file onto his PC. • The program will take about twenty minutes to upload from the disk.

downside The vogue word downside means ‘unfavourable aspect’; it is best avoided where disadvantage would be more appropriate: • the downside of the new system • Every scientific break-through has its downside.

downsizing Downsizing is the act of reducing in size. In America in the late 1970s it referred to the production of smaller cars: • With the whole industry downsizing, big-car addicts will find fewer alternatives (Time).

In Britain in the late 1980s it referred to redundancy: • downsizing the workforce • In the case of the latest cut – 33 jobs to go at US investment bank L.F. Rothschild – downsizing is something of an understatement (The Guardian).

♦ The term is also used in computing: • ‘Downsizing’ simply means that firms are tending to buy smaller computers to do jobs which used to require big ones (The Guardian).

Down’s syndrome This is the preferred modern term for the congenital disorder formerly known as mongolism, a term that is now widely considered unacceptable.

♦ Named after the English physician J. H. L. Down (1828–96), the disorder is known as Down syndrome in American English.

downward or downwards? In British English downward is principally used as an adjective, downwards being the usual form of the adverb meaning ‘to a lower level’: • a downward slope • to look downwards.

♦ The adverb downward is more frequently used in American English.

See also -WARD or -WARDS?

dowse see DOUSE or DOWSE?

draft see DRAUGHT or DRAFT?

dramatist or playwright? Dramatist and playwright are synonymous words, both dating from the late seventeenth century and meaning ‘a person who writes plays’: •
He is a poet as well as a dramatist/playwright.

- There may be a slight tendency to apply dramatist to those who write more serious plays or plays which conform to the traditional categories of drama: • Racine was a dramatist writing in the classical tradition, and playwright to modern writers and those whose work is less serious: • playwrights like Neil Simon who are popular on both sides of the Atlantic.

Note the spelling of the final syllable of playwright: -wright, not -write.

draught or draft? These words are sometimes confused. A draft is a preliminary outline: • a rough draft of the essay. A draught is also a money order and a group of soldiers. Draught is the spelling for: • draught beer • draught animals • a draught from an open door. The American English spelling of draught is draft.

- A person who draws up a rough version of a document is a draftsman; an artist or someone who prepares detailed drawings of buildings, machinery, etc., is a draughtsman (feminine, draughtswoman; American English draftsman).

The board game called draughts in British English is known as checkers in American English.

draughtsman or draughtswoman? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

drafting room see LOUNGE.

dreamed or dreamt? Either word may be used as the past tense and past participle of the verb dream: • I dreamed/dreamt I was in Australia.

See also -ed or -t?

Dreamed may be pronounced [d्रɛmd] or [draumed]; dreamt is always pronounced [dɾɛmt].

dress-down day This contemporary business term refers to the practice of allowing employees to wear casual clothing at work on designated days of the week. • We all look forward to dress-down Friday. As a vogue term, dress-down day, and its less frequently encountered opposite, dress-up day, is considered jargonistic by many people and is best restricted to informal contexts.

See also DESK DINING; DUVET DAY; HOT-DESKING.

drier or dryer? Drier is the usual spelling of the comparative form of the adjective dry; both are equally common for the noun derived from the verb dry: • These socks are drier than those. • a hair-dryer/drier • a spin-dryer/drier.

drugs slang The drugs subculture has contributed a large number of slang coinages to British and American English. Some of these terms are useful as they provide succinct names for otherwise unwieldy chemical titles, but care should be taken over their use as they tend to come into and go out of fashion very rapidly. Examples of slang terms that have remained current through the years are: • E or Ecstasy (for the drug MDMA) • speed (amphetamines) • crystal (methamphetamines) • weed (cannabis) • smack (heroin) • acid (LSD). Terms that are less common today include: • hash (cannabis) • horse (heroin).

drunk or drunken? Both drunk and drunken are adjectives applied to alcoholic intoxication, but drunk is normally used after a verb: • She got drunk on cheap white wine, while drunken is normally used before a noun: • We were just sipping sherry — it was hardly a drunken orgy. • the campaign against drunken driving.

- However, drunk implies temporary intoxication, while drunken suggests a habitual state of being drunk. When this distinction is being emphasized it is possible to reverse the usual rule and use drunk before a noun: • drunk driving and, though less frequently, drunken after a verb: • He was drunken, foul-mouthed, and inconsiderate.

dryer see DRIER or DRYER?

dual or duel? These two words are sometimes confused, being identical in pronunciation. Dual is an adjective, meaning 'double'; duel is a noun or verb referring to a rather formal fight between two people: • dual-purpose • a dual carriage • the duel of the champions • to settle a quarrel by duelling.

- Note that in British English the final /l of duel is doubled before -ed, -(ing), -er, etc.

dubious see DOUBTFUL or DUBIOUS?

duel see DUAL or DUET?

due to, owing to or because of? Although these phrases have roughly the same meanings they are not used in the same way. Due to should strictly speaking
be used only adjectivally: • His shakiness is due to Parkinson’s disease; whereas owing to and because of are used as prepositions: • We were delayed owing to an electrical fault on the line. • Because of poor health he took early retirement.

• Although the use of due to as a preposition is objected to by careful users, this usage is becoming increasingly widespread: • Due to the sheer size of the operation, we now need additional people to join our . . . Membership Recruitment and Corporate Marketing Departments (Sunday Times).

du jour This French phrase, meaning ‘of the day’, has become a standard term used in menus to indicate a dish available on a particular day (le plat du jour). It has recently been adopted in a wider context to denote something that is currently popular or fashionable but not likely to remain so for long: • The health scare du jour is the claim that such products can raise cholesterol levels. It is best restricted to informal use.

dumb or mute? A person who is dumb cannot speak. As dumb also means ‘stupid’ in very informal contexts, many users of English prefer to use the word mute when referring to people who are unable to speak. However, mute can also cause offence (see Deaf-Mute).

duplication or duplicity? The noun duplication is derived from the verb duplicate, meaning ‘copy’ or ‘repeat’; the more formal noun duplicity means ‘deception’ or ‘double-dealing’: • There may be some duplication in the text. • They were unaware of his duplicity. The two nouns should not be confused.

dustman or dustwoman? see Nonsexist Terms.

duvet day This contemporary business term refers to the practice of allowing employees to take an occasional day off work at short notice: • In addition to holidays, staff are allowed half a dozen duvet days over the year. As a vogue term, duvet day is considered jargonistic by many people and is best restricted to informal contexts.

See also Desk Dining; Dress-down Day; Hot Desking.

dwarf Dwarf is no longer considered an acceptable term for an abnormally small person. None of the alternatives so far coined, such as person of restricted growth, has achieved wide acceptance. The term midget may also cause offence and should be avoided.

• Note that dwarfs is the more frequent plural of dwarf, although dwarves is also acceptable.

dwelled or dwelt? Either word may be used as the past tense and past participle of the verb dwell. Dwelled is more frequent in American English than in British English, but dwelt is the preferred form in both: • He dwelt on her infidelity.

See also -ed or -t?

dying or dyeing? These spellings are sometimes confused. Dying is the present participle of the verb die, meaning ‘cease to live’: • Her son is dying. • His dying words. 

Dyeing is the present participle of the verb dye, meaning ‘change the colour of’: • She was dyeing her hair blonde.

dynamic Dynamic is an overworked vogue word meaning ‘lively, forceful, or energetic’: • The Party needs young, dynamic leadership.

• Its frequent use, particularly in job advertisements, has considerably weakened its impact: • If you are aged 28 +, a dynamic team leader and an imaginative business organiser (Daily Telegraph). • Self-motivated, dynamic person required (The Times).

dynasty The preferred British English pronunciation of dynasty, which means ‘series of hereditary rulers’, is [dɪnəsti]. The American English pronunciation [dɪnəstɪ] is sometimes also used in British English.

dys- see Dis- or Dys-?

dyslexic or dyslectic? The words dyslexic and dyslectic are interchangeable; either may be used as a noun or adjective to describe a person suffering from dyslexia, though dyslexic is used much more frequently.
e- The prefix e-, meaning 'electronic', has been used to form numerous new words since the advent of the Internet and web-based business: e-mail • e-business • e-commerce • e-trade • e-book • e-shopping • e-bill • e-learning • e-ticket. Note the growing tendency to drop the hyphen following e: • email • seine • e-marketing.

each When each is used as a determiner or as a pronoun which is the subject of a sentence, the rule is that subsequent verbs and pronouns should be singular: Each man has his price. Each of the operas was sung in English.

- The rule is frequently broken, partly because those who are sensitive to sexism in language prefer: Each student had a paper handed to them (rather than to him). Of course, one can avoid both sexism and grammatical error by rephrasing such sentences: All the students had a paper handed to them. When each follows a plural noun or pronoun which is the subject of the sentence, the subsequent verb is plural: The cakes each have cherries on top.

each or both? See BOTH.

each or every? Each and every are interchangeable in some contexts: He picked up each book in turn • He picked up every book in turn. There is, however, a subtle but important difference between the two in that each emphasizes the individuality of each person or item under consideration, while every treats them collectively, within a group: each car in the garage • every ship in the fleet.

- Note, however, that each, not every, should be used after a plural noun: The guests each have their own room, and also that each refers to two or more in number, while every refers to at least three in number: She put a shoe on each foot. • She had frostbite in every finger.

each and every Each and every is used for emphasis in such phrases as: Each and every person has a vital part to play. • I am deeply grateful to each and every one of you. It is disliked by most careful users as a cliché and as an unnecessarily wordy construction for which each, everyone, or all can often be substituted.

each or one another? The traditional rule is that each other is used when two elements are involved and one another when more than two are involved: Helen and Charles love each other deeply. All the people at the party already knew one another. However, there is no particular reason for this rule and most people feel free to ignore it.

- There is a slight difference between the two phrases in that each other tends to emphasize each individual element whereas one another sounds more general. So it would be preferable to say: They were throwing one another into the swimming pool rather than throwing each other, the former gives a general impression of horseplay and allows for the odd person who was neither thrown nor throwing, while the latter suggests something much more systematic.

earthly or earthy? Earthly relates to the earth as opposed to heaven; earthy refers to earth in the sense of 'soil': our earthly life • an earthy paradise • an earthy taste/texture. The two adjectives are not interchangeable.

- Both words have other meanings. Earthly is used informally in the sense of 'possible', usually in negative contexts or in questions: What earthly reason could she have for saying that? • They haven't an earthly chance of success. Earthy means 'coarse' or 'crude': an earthy remark.

east, East or eastern? As an adjective, east is always written with a capital E when it forms part of a place-name: East Anglia • the East End. The noun east is usually written with a capital E when it denotes a specific region, such as the countries of Asia: She has travelled extensively in the East. East-West relations.

- In other contexts, and as an adverb, east is
usually written with a lower-case e: • They sailed east in search of land. • The east wind chilled him to the marrow. • The sun rises in the east.

The adjective eastern is more frequent and usually less specific than the adjective east: • the eastern shore of eastern Australia.

Like east, eastern is written with a capital E when it forms part of a proper name, such as: • the Eastern Orthodox Church. With or without a capital E, it also means 'of the East': • eastern/ Eastern philosophy.

eastward or eastwards? Eastward is the correct choice when an adjective is needed: • an eastward direction. Either eastward or eastwards may be used when an adverb is required: • They travelled eastward from the city. • The skies were full of birds flying eastwards.

See also -WARD or -WARDS.

eatable or edible? Eatable means 'palatable', but with the suggestion of 'not actually tasting unpleasant' rather than 'delicious': • He had managed to get together a reasonably eatable meal. Edible means 'suitable for eating as food': • Common sorrel is edible but wood sorrel is poisonous.

◆ If something is not edible it would be either impossible or dangerous to eat it, but a substance can be edible without being eatable, for example, raw potatoes. Despite these differences the two words are often used interchangeably in informal contexts: • The cabbage was overcooked but just about eatable/edible.

The distinction between eatable and edible is also applicable to their antonyms, uneatable and inedible: • The meal was uneatable. • Toadstools are inedible.

echelon Echelon is a military expression applying to the formation of units or to a division of a supply organization. It is now often used as a fashionable synonym for grade, rank, level of power, or to describe the people at that level: • the management echelon • the higher echelons of the civil service.

◆ Note the spelling: ch not sh, and although the word comes from the French échelon there is no acute accent on the English word.

The usual pronunciation is [əˈʃələn], although [əˈʃəln] is sometimes heard.

eco- The growing popularity of the science of ecology, the study of living things in their relationship to the environment, has given rise to several words with the prefix eco-, some legitimate terms in ecology: • ecospécies • ecotype • ecosystem, and some more modern coinages: • ecocatastrophe • eco-freak • ecotourism • ecotoxicology.

◆ New eco- words are being spawned all the time: • a new magazine... described as the journal of eco-politics (The Guardian) • the eco-warriors of Greenpeace (Sunday Times).

economic or economical? Economic is the adjective from economics or the economy and is concerned with the production, distribution, and structure of wealth: • Friedman's economic theories • the Government's economic policies. Economical is the adjective from economy and is concerned with thrift and the avoidance of waste: • an economical car • a large economical pack.

An economic price is one that benefits the seller, but an economical price benefits the buyer.

◆ Although careful users keep the distinction between the two words, each is frequently used with the meaning belonging to the other: • Labour gave fewer details of their economical brief (BBC Radio) • Buying a whole chicken makes economic sense (advertisement. B&Q magazine).

The initial e- of both words may be short [eˈkəmənikl] or long [eˈkəmənikl].

economics see -ics.

ecstasy This word, meaning 'intense emotion', especially of happiness, is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the c and the -asy ending, as in fantasy.

◆ Ecstasy, usually spelt capitalized, is the slang name for the drug methylenedioxymethamphetamine, or MDMA.

-ed or -t? The past tense and past participle of the verbs burn, dream, dwell, kneel, lean, leap, learn, smell, spell, spill, and spoil may end in -ed or -t.

◆ In most cases the -ed form is preferred in American English and the -t form is slightly more frequent in British English. For further discussion and specific information or pronunciation and adjectival use see the entries at the individual words.

edible see EATABLE or EDIBLE?

-ee or -er? In general, the suffix -ee can be applied to the recipient of an action denoted by the verb to which the suffix is attached, and the suffix -er is applied to the
thing or person who performs the action: • employer–employee • trainer–trainee. However, this rule does not apply in all cases. The suffix -ee can sometimes indicate someone who behaves in a particular way: • absentee • arrestee • escapee, and the suffix -er can be applied to something that is a suitable object for an action: • prisoner • cooker (type of apple). • The suffix -ee is also found as a substitute for -ie or -y, suggesting smallness, in the word bootie, and is sometimes applied to people or things associated with a particular noun: • townee • goatee, although -er is more often used in this way: • docker • villager.

effect see AFFECT or EFFECT?

effective, effectual, efficacious or efficient? The distinction between these words is subtle. Effective means ‘having or producing the desired effect’: • The talks were effective in settling the dispute. Effectual, a formal word, means ‘capable of achieving the desired effect’: • All plans to reduce the trade deficit have not so far proved effectual, and in religious contexts: • effectual prayer • God’s effectual calling of his people. Efficacious, also a formal word, means ‘having the power to achieve the desired effect’ and is usually applied to medical treatment: • an efficacious remedy. Efficient is applied to people or things producing results through a good and economical use of resources: • an efficient machine • an efficient secretary. • Similar distinctions apply to ineffective, inefficacious, and inefficient: • an ineffective remedy • an ineffectual policymaker • an inefficient system clerk.

Effective is used in various other ways. It can mean ‘impressive’: • an effective performance, ‘operative; in force’: • The law is effective as from today, and ‘actual; in practice if not theory’: • He had become the effective leader.

effeminate or effete? To describe a man or boy as effeminate means that one thinks that he shows, in an excessive manner, qualities which are usually thought of as being feminine: • he spoke in a high-pitched, effeminate voice. Effete is used more rarely, particularly in formal contexts, and means ‘weak or powerless’: • charming but effete aristocrat.
• Effete is derived originally from Latin ex and

efus ‘fruitful’, meaning ‘worn out by producing offspring’. It became applied to systems that were no longer effective and in the 20th century has also been applied to effeminate boys and men.

effrontery see AFFRONTE or EFFRONTERY?

e.g. and i.e. The abbreviation e.g. stands for exempli gratia and means ‘for example’. It is used before examples of what has previously been mentioned: • We could show you some of the sights, e.g. Buckingham Palace and the Tower of London. The abbreviation i.e., often used in error for e.g. stands for id est and means ‘that is’. It is used before amplifications or explanations of what has previously been mentioned: • They were vegans, i.e. vegetarians who also avoid eggs and dairy products.

• The abbreviations e.g. and i.e. are best confined to official writing or very informal writing; in other contexts and in speech for example and that is should be used.

• It is usual in American English to render e.g. and i.e. with both full stops, but there is an increasing tendency to omit them in British English.

Note that it is incorrect to end a list that begins with e.g. with etc.

egoism or egotism? The words egoism and egotism are frequently used interchangeably but there are differences between them. Egoism is applied to the ethical theory that all actions and motivation are based on self-interest. An egoist is a believer in this theory or, much more often, a person who is selfish and self-seeking: • His conduct was characterised by ruthless egoism. Egotism means ‘being self-obsessed; self-centred’. The typical egotist is vain, boastful, and uses the word I constantly: • Her egotism makes her oblivious to other people’s concerns.

• The conspicuous self-obsession of egotists often makes them absurd pathetic figures, whereas egoists may pursue their own interests in a covert, though calculating, manner.

egregious The adjective egregious, used in formal contexts and meaning ‘very bad’, is sometimes mispelt and/or mispronounced. Note the -gi- in the middle of the word. The correct pronunciation is [ɪɡrɪˈdʒɪs].

eighth Note that in the spelling of this word the letter h occurs twice: eight plus h.

either As an adjective or pronoun either is
used with a singular verb: • Is either child left-handed? • Is either of your children left-handed?

In the either . . . or construction, a singular verb is used if both subjects are singular and a plural verb is used if both subjects are plural: • Either David or Peter is responsible. • Either their parents or their teachers are responsible. The use of a plural verb with the pronoun either or with singular subjects in an either . . . or construction is avoided by careful users, especially in formal contexts.

When a combination of singular and plural subjects occurs in an either . . . or construction, the verb traditionally agrees with the subject that is nearest to it: • Either David or his parents are responsible. • Either his friends or his brother is responsible. The same principle is applied to singular subjects that are used with different forms of the verb: • Either you or I am (not are) responsible. If the resulting sentence sounds awkward or undiagnostic it may be reordered or rephrased.

The alternatives presented in an either . . . or construction should be grammatically balanced: • Dilute the soup either with milk or water may be changed to: Dilute the soup either with milk or with water or: Dilute the soup with either milk or water.

As a pronoun either should be used only of two alternatives: • I haven’t seen either of my parents since June. • Any [not either] of the four knives may be used to cut vegetables. However, the use of the either . . . or construction with three or more subjects is acceptable to some: • Either Sarah, Jane, or Pauline will be there.

The first syllable of either may be pronounced to rhyme with fry or try. The pronunciation [ethə] is more frequent in British English.

See also NEITHER

**eke out** The original meaning of eke out is ‘make something more adequate by adding to it’: • She eked out the meal with extra rice. It is frequently used in two other senses: ‘make something last longer by using it economically’: • They eked out the supplies over two weeks, and ‘make a living with laborious effort’: • The children eked out a living by selling wild flowers to tourists.

Both these uses, particularly the latter, are disliked by some careful users, but they are well-established and generally acceptable.

elder, eldest, older or oldest? Elder and eldest are applied only to people, and usually within the context of family relationships: • my eldest brother • She is the elder of my two daughters. One cannot say: • Rachel is elder than Sarah or: • He is elder/oldest without adding the. Elder and oldest can be used of things as well as people, and in a far wider range of constructions: • I am older than David. • He is older. • It is the oldest church in Yorkshire.

Elder is also used in such expressions as: • I am his elder by eighteen months although: • I am older than him by eighteen months sounds less formal. It is also used for people noted for age and experience: • an elder statesman • village elders • one’s elders and betters; and for an officer in various nonconformist churches. See also COMPARATIVE and SUPERLATIVE.

**electric or electrical?** Electric and electrical can both mean ‘worked by electricity’ although electric tends to be applied more to specific, and electrical to general things: • electrical lighting • an electric motor • electrical appliances • electrical equipment.

Electric is also applied to things that produce or carry electricity: • an electric socket • electric current • an electric shock, and is used figuratively to describe something stimulating or thrilling: • The atmosphere was electric. Electrical is also used to mean ‘concerned with electricity’: • electrical engineering.

elemental or elementary? Elemental means ‘of or like the elements or forces of nature’: • This evoked a flood of elemental passion. It is also sometimes used to mean ‘fundamental or essential’: • an elemental truth of Christianity. It should not be confused with elementary which means ‘very simple; introductory’: • I know nothing about computers so I need an elementary manual.

A further possible mistake is the confusion of elementary with alimentary which means ‘to do with the provision of nourishment’: • the alimentary canal.

elicit see ILLUSTRATE OR ILLUSTRATE?

eligible see INELIGIBLE OR INELIGIBLE?

eclipse or Ellipsis? An eclipse is an oval; Ellipsis is a term used in grammar and linguistics (see ELLIPSIS). The two nouns share the derived adjective elliptical: • an elliptical shape • an elliptical phrase. Elliptical also means ‘ambiguous’ or ‘obscure in formal contexts: • an elliptical reference.
ellipses There are two meanings of the term ellipsis in grammar: one is for the punctuation marks . . . , usually indicating omission; the other is for the omission of words in a sentence, as an abbreviation or in order to avoid repetition: • See you Friday. • I ought to write some letters and make some phone calls.

• The ellipsis . . . is used mainly to indicate an omission from a quoted passage; • There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance . . . and there is panies, that’s for thoughts.’ If the quotation does not start at the beginning of a sentence the ellipsis precedes it: • ... a good fellow of infinite jest,

and when the end of a sentence is omitted the three dots of the ellipsis are sometimes followed by a fourth, to indicate a full stop: • ‘Cudgel thy brains no more . . .; if a whole sentence is left out the sentence before the omitted one has a full stop and the ellipsis follows. An ellipsis is always three dots, or four if a full stop is included, except when a whole line of poetry is omitted, when a row of dots can be used to fill the length of the line.

The ellipsis is also used in the same manner as the dash, to indicate halting speech, an unfinished sentence, or an omitted obscenity (see DASH). When used for an unfinished sentence, a dash suggests a more abrupt break, while an ellipsis gives an impression of speech trailing off: • ‘I suppose I had hoped that you might . . .’. An ellipsis should not be used at the end of a passage to suggest that the rest of an episode can be left to the reader’s imagination.

When using ellipsis in sentences to avoid repetition, the danger is that the omitted word(s) might not correspond with the word(s) repeated, as in the following two examples. In: • I know him as well or even better than you do, which in full would be know him as well as or even better than you know him; the second as is omitted after as well but does not appear later in the sentence. In: • No one ever or will ever solve the mystery, the omitted word is solved, not solved. The only case in which such a false ellipsis is acceptable is when the omitted word is part of the verb to be: • I’m going to London and Sarah to Edinburgh.

e-mail There are a number of broadly accepted conventions relating to the style and layout of e-mails (or emails).

1 The layout of the headers (giving the identity of the sender, the person or persons to whom the message has been sent, etc.) is inserted automatically by the software and is thus rarely subject to stylistic variation. Note that it is considered good practice always to complete the one optional element of the header, the box in which the sender briefly summarizes the content of the message. Some care should be taken over the wording of this summary, as some computer software will filter out messages that appear from this summary to be junk mail or to contain obscene or offensive material.

2 The style for salutations is less rigid than for letters. Some users prefer the formal greetings associated with letter writing (Dear Mr Smith, etc.) and dislike the informality of Hi Sam! or Hello Joe! Others may simply state the addressee’s name: • Mr Smith • Bill, or alternatively launch straight into the message itself, particularly if replying to another’s message: • That’s fine with me, let’s meet on Friday.

3 The e-mail itself should ideally be immediately visible in its entirety on the screen, avoiding the need for the reader to scroll down to get to the end. In terms of content, writers should observe the usual conventions of letter writing, taking care over spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Some users, however, deliberately flout the usual conventions in the interests of making their writing feel spontaneous and informal: • hiyaah! wot u reckon to this then i think its cool. The use of empty lines between paragraphs and the insertion of bullet points or numbered sections makes for greater clarity. When replying to a previous message and making use of the ‘reply to’ facility, it is best to add a reply

e-mail
embrace

either above or below the received message and to avoid interspersing the existing text with responses.

4 The use of capital letters is similar to shouting and should be avoided. Asterisks can be used to highlight particular words *like this*.

5 Many people close their e-mails with the fixed phrases traditionally used in letter writing (Best wishes, Love from, With thanks, etc.). Note, however, that the more formal *Yours faithfully* and *Yours sincerely* are relatively rare. Some people type their name as a signature or have it appended automatically, while others omit any closing phrase altogether.

See also LETTER WRITING; NETSPEAK; SMILEY; TEXT MESSAGING.

embrace This word, meaning 'cause to feel shy, ashamed, or self-conscious'; *She was embarrassed by her brother's behaviour*, is often misspelt. Note the -rr-, the -rr-, and the last vowel, which is an a, not an e.

emend see AMEND or EMEND?

emigrant or immigrant? An emigrant is someone who is migrating from his or her country; *Thousands of emigrants left Britain for Australia under the assisted passage scheme*. An immigrant is someone who is migrating into another country; *Some of the immigrants had only been in the country for a week*.

◊ The word *emigrant* should not be applied to nonwhite British residents unless one is sure that they were actually born abroad.

The word *emigrant* is applied to someone who has been forced to leave a country, usually because of a repressive political regime or intellectual atmosphere. The reasons for leaving are generally less pressing than for those described as refugees, and *émigré* carries a suggestion of refined class and intellect that refugee lacks *Nabokov is the most famous of Russian émigré writers*.

eminent, imminent or immanent? *Eminent* means 'outstanding, notable, or distinguished' and is particularly applied to people who have achieved some distinction or fame in their profession, or in the arts or sciences; *an eminent barrister* *an eminent poet*. *Imminent* means 'impending; about to happen; threatening'; *It now seemed that war was imminent*.

◊ *Imminent* should not be confused with the far less frequently used word *immanent*, which means 'inherent, indwelling', and has the respective philosophical and theological meanings of 'inherent' and 'penetrating all things throughout the universe'.

emoticon see SMILEY.

emotive or emotional? *Emotive* means 'causing or arousing emotion, especially as opposed to reason'; *Emotive means expressing emotion, showing excessive emotion'; *an emotional woman* *an emotional meeting*.

◊ *Emotive* is often used when *emotional* is intended, especially since the word has become more fashionable; *She is very emotive and gets emotionally involved herself*. *Emotional* is also sometimes used when emotive would be better, although it is acceptable to use emotional in this sense; *It features television spots of almost wretched pathos, and is being supported by equally emotional posters*. *(Sunday Times)*.

empathy *Empathy means 'an imaginative identification with another's feelings or ideas'; *He read all he could about the king, and meditated on his character, so by the time he came to play the part he felt a real empathy with Henry. It has recently become a fashionable word and its frequent use as a mere synonym for sympathy is disliked by some; *Essential attributes are... an empathy for the ideals within a voluntary organisation* (Daily Telegraph).

emulate *Emulate means 'attempt to equal or do better than, especially by close imitation'; *Since the company's success all our competitors are trying to emulate our products*.

◊ The word is often used in the sense of 'imitate closely' without the idea of rivalry; *As a teenager he had admired John Lennon devotedly and had tried to emulate him in his dress and speech. This usage is disliked by some*.

enable The word *enabled* is in increasing use as a suffix, meaning 'made capable of working with a particular system'; *a WAP-enabled phone*. As a suffix, it should not be overused as some people may find it jargonistic.

◊ Note also the use of *enabling* to describe the conferring of additional legal powers; *enabling legislation*.
en bloc The French expression *en bloc* means 'all together, all at the same time': • The whole committee decided to resign *en bloc*.

encyclopedia or *encyclopaedia*? Both spellings of this word are acceptable, *encyclopaedia* being the more traditional in British English. In American English *encyclopedia* is the more frequent spelling and this spelling is now becoming standard in British English.

See also *-ae* and *-e*.

end The verb *end* is followed by the preposition *in* or *with*: • *words ending in* [or with] *-er*, and by *in* in the sense 'have as a result': • *Their marriage ended in divorce*. In the sense 'finish' it is followed by *with*: • He ended his speech with a vote of thanks.

endemic or *epidemic*? Endemic, a formal word, is most frequently used as an adjective, meaning 'occurring in a particular area': • *an endemic disease* • *The plant is endemic in [or to] Africa*. An epidemic is the widespread occurrence or rapid spread of a disease: • *a flu epidemic* • *an epidemic of measles*.

• Endemic may also be used as a noun and epidemic as an adjective. Both words have figurative uses: • Vandalism is endemic in the inner cities.

• There was an epidemic of resignations after the takeover.

definition of the term *end*.

end product and *end result* End product usually means 'the final product of a process, or series of processes': • *We use the best materials so that the end product is a quality item*. • *These young men are the end products of expensive public schools and the most exclusive colleges*.

• Both phrases may simply mean 'the eventual outcome', as in the phrase *end result*: • The agreement is the end product/end result of many years of negotiation. Many careful users dislike both these phrases as the end is clearly redundant.

energize *Enervate* means 'weaken, to lessen vitality or strength': • *It was an enervating climate and they felt listless most of the time*.

• It is sometimes used as though it meant quite the opposite, as a synonym for *invigorate* or *energize*, and is also sometimes used as though it meant 'irritate' or 'get on someone's nerves'. *Enervate* is most often used in the forms *enervated* or *enervat*.

enrole In British English the verb *enrole* ends in a single *e*, unlike the word *roll*. The *l* is doubled before suffixes beginning with a vowel: • *enrolled* • *enrolling*.

• Note that the derived noun *enrolment* has only
en suite

one (in British English, the American spellings are enroll and enrollment).

en suite En suite, denoting an adjoining bathroom and bedroom, has long been in use as an adjective: *an en suite bathroom.* The adoption of *en suite* as a noun is disliked by some and best restricted to informal contexts: *Does the bedroom have an en suite?*

*En suite* is pronounced [on suyt].

ensure see assured, ensure or insure?

-ent see -ant or -ent?

enterprise Some people dislike the over-use of the noun *enterprise* in the context of self-employment and the setting up of new small businesses: *the enterprise culture* • *the government's Enterprise Allowance Scheme* • *a network of Local Enterprise Agencies* • *Britain's enterprise economy* • *the enterprise initiative.*

*An enterprise* is also simply a business or company: *several large industrial enterprises.* Private enterprise is industry and business owned by independent individuals or groups, i.e. not receiving financial help from the government.

Note the spelling of *enterprise,* which always ends in -ise, unlike the word *prize.*

enthrall In British English the verb *enthrall* ends in a single l, which is doubled before suffixes beginning with a vowel: *enthralling* • *enthralling.* Note that the derived noun *enthrallment* has only one l (in British English, the American spellings are *enthrallment* and *enthrallment.*

enthusiastic The verb *enthusiastic* is a back formation from *enthusiasm* and means 'show enthusiasm': *The critic enthused over her new play,* or 'make enthusiastic': *The minister enthused his congregation with his vision of a new church.*

*Although it has been in use, especially in American English, for over a century, it is still disliked by many people and is perhaps best avoided in formal use.*

entomology or etymology? Entomology is the study of insects; etymology is the study of the origin and development of words. The two nouns should not be confused.

*An etymologist* may think that all centipedes have a hundred legs, as the word is derived from Latin centum 'hundred' and pes 'foot', but an entomologist knows that they do not.

entourage Of French origin, the noun *entourage,* meaning 'attendants; retinue,' is pronounced [on twaʁ].

entrepreneur Like *enterprise,* the noun *entrepreneur* is losing its traditional connotations of risk and initiative and is indiscriminately applied to anyone who becomes self-employed or sets up a new small business: *Skills appear to be the main requirement for successful entrepreneurship . . . in contrast with the simple traditional view of the entrepreneur as someone who is risk loving (The Guardian).* *She regularly scour<ed the Business for Sale columns of the papers for the inspiration that would turn her into an entrepreneur (Daily Telegraph).*

*Of French origin, the noun *entrepreneur* is frequently misspelt. Note that it begins with entre, not enter, and ends in -eur, not -er.*

E-numbers E-numbers, which appear on food labels as E401, E218, etc., denote additives that have been approved for use throughout the European Union. The belief that E-numbers denote harmful artificial substances is a popular misconception: E400(a), for example, is pectin, which occurs naturally in ripe fruit and vegetables; E270 is lactric acid, which is found in dairy products; and E150 is caramel. The term was popularized by Maurice Hanson in *E for Additives* (1984).

envelop or envelope? The verb *envelop* means 'enclose, surround, or enfold' and is used both literally and figuratively: *He was enveloped in a blanket and barely visible.*

*She spent a happy childhood, enveloped in love and security.* The noun *envelope* means 'something that envelops, a wrapper (particularly for a letter)': *It arrived in a plain brown envelope.*

*Envelope* is pronounced [envələʊ]. The preferred pronunciation of envelope is [envələʊ], although [envələʊ] is also heard.

enviable or envious? Both these adjectives are derived from the word *envy* (see ENVY or JEALOUSY!). *Enviable* means 'causing envy'; *envious* means 'feeling envy': *the envious task of shoring the film star around the building,* *He was envious of his sister's success.* The two words are not interchangeable.

environment Environment can be applied to the surrounding conditions of people
and other organisms and can include physical and social influences, though many people are careful not to overuse this word.

- Environment and its derived nouns environmentalism and environmentalist are now much used ecology and the protection of the world's physical environment from pollution; the present wave of environmentalism is now being viewed as a long-term influence on the market.

See also FRIENDLY, GREEN.

envision or envision? Both envision and envision mean 'have a mental image of, especially of something hoped for in the future'; they envisaged/envisioned a world where war and poverty no longer existed. Envision is more often used in British English and envision in American English.

- The words should not be used as mere synonyms for 'expect'; a further downward trend in share prices is envisaged. Careful users avoid using these words with that.
- We envisage an improvement in the situation [not envision that the situation will improve].

envy or jealousy? Envy involves the awareness of an advantage possessed by someone else, together with a desire to have that advantage oneself; she gazed at his car with envy. I envy your ability to relax. Jealousy involves a concern to avoid the loss of something that one regards as one's own, and includes the tendency to be suspicious of rivalry and infidelity in relation to a person one is close to.

- Her husband's jealousy forced her to conceal even the most innocent encounters with other men.

ephemeral This word, meaning 'lasting only a short time'; the ephemeral pleasures of life, is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the ph, pronounced [f], and the sequence of vowels.

epic Epic originally applied to long narrative poems on a grand, heroic scale, like Homer's Iliad and Odyssey or the Finnish Kalevala. It was extended to other works with some of these qualities or to series of events or episodes which might be fit subjects for an epic:

- a marvellous epic novel (Newsweek, review of Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children)
- the epic battle between Greenpeace and the whaling ships.

- It is also sometimes used of anything more than usually large and impressive;

an epic gathering, but it is preferable not to use the word so that it entirely loses its connection with its heroic origins.

epidemic see ENDEMIC or EPIDEMIC?

epigram, epigraph, epitaph or epither? These four nouns should not be confused. An epigram is a short witty saying; an epigraph, the least common of the four words, is a quotation or motto printed at the beginning of a book or engraved on a monument. An epitaph is a commemorative statement about a dead person, often inscribed on a gravestone; an epither is a short descriptive word or phrase applied to a person, such as Lionheart in Richard the Lionheart.

- Some people dislike the extended euphemistic use of the word epitaph in the sense of 'term of abuse'; shouting epitaphs at each other.

epitome This word, meaning 'typical example'; he's the very epitome of the absent-minded professor, is sometimes mispronounced. Note that there are four syllables [epīтом].

eponym An eponym is a person from whose name a word is derived: sandbag • quilling • cardigan • ampere. There are eponymous nouns: martinet • salmonella • listeria • snail, adjectives: quixotic • herculean, and verbs: bouderize • guillotine.

- The only problem with the use of eponymous words is whether or not they are written with a capital letter. The rough rule is that the closer the connection between the word and the name, the more likely it is that a capital should be used. When one calls a young man given to amorous adventures a Romeo, one is making a definite allusion to the Shakespearean character and would use a capital. One would use a capital when referring to Platonic forms but not when referring to platonic love, a concept further removed from Plato. There are no firm rules with things named after the person who invented or popularized them. Generally, such words are more likely to be capitalized when used adjectivally than when used as nouns: Wellington boots • wellingtons, but this is very much a matter of custom. Pullman cars and Bunsen burners are nearly always capitalized, while diesel engine hardly ever is. Eponymous verbs such as: boycott • pasteurize never have capital letters.
EPONYMOUS WORDS

ampere the basic metric unit of electric current, named after André Marie Ampère, French physicist, 1775–1836
atlas a book of maps, named after Atlas, Greek mythological character, one of the Titans who, as punishment for his part in the effort to overthrow Zeus, was condemned to hold up the heavens on his shoulders for the rest of his life
aubrieta a trailing perennial plant bearing small purple flowers, named after Claude Aubriet, French painter of flowers and animals, 1665–1742
baud a unit of measuring the speed of electronic data transmission, especially one equal to 1 unit of information per second, named after Jean M. E. Baudot, French inventor and pioneer of telegraphic communication, 1845–1903
Beaufort scale a measure of wind speed, named after Sir Francis Beaufort, surveyor, 1774–1857
becquerel a basic metric unit of radiation activity, equal to one disintegration per second, named after Antoine-Henri Becquerel, French physicist, 1852–1908
begonia a genus of succulent herbaceous plants, named after Michel Bégon, French patron of science, 1638–1710
Belisha beacon a flashing light in an amber ball that is mounted on a post to mark a pedestrian crossing, named after 1st Baron (Isaak) Leslie Hore-Belisha, British politician, 1893–1957
Biro a trademark used to describe a kind of ballpoint pen, named after László Jozsef Biro, Hungarian-born inventor, 1900–85
bloomers the women’s undergarment that has full, loose legs gathered at the knee, named after Amelia Jenks Bloomer, American feminist, 1818–94
bougainvillea a genus of tropical South American woody climbing shrubs, named after Louis Antoine de Bougainville, French navigator, 1729–1811
bowdlerize to remove words or passages considered indecent from a book, named after Thomas Bowdler, British doctor, 1734–1825
bowie knife a stout hunting knife, with a long, one-edged blade curving to a point, named after James Bowie, American soldier and adventurer, 1799–1836
boycott to refuse to deal with a person, organization, etc., named after Captain Charles Cunningham Boycott, Irish landlord, 1832–97
Boyle’s law that at a constant temperature, the pressure of a gas is inversely proportionate to its volume, named after Robert Boyle, Irish-born British physicist, 1627–91
Braille the system of raised dots by which blind people can read, named after Louis Braille, Frenchman, 1809–52
buddleia a genus of trees and shrubs that have showy clusters of mauve or white flowers, named after Adam Buddle, Essex rector and botanist, c. 1660–1715
Bunsen burner the gas burner with an adjustable air valve, named after Robert Wilhelm Bunsen, German chemist, 1811–99
camellia a genus of ornamental shrubs, named after George Joseph Kamel, Moravian Jesuit missionary, 1661–1706
cardigan a knitted jacket or sweater fastened with buttons, named after James Thomas Brudenell, 7th Earl of Cardigan, British cavalry officer, 1797–1865
Celsius the temperature scale for which 0 is the freezing point of water and 100 the boiling point, named after Anders Celsius, Swedish astronomer and scientist, 1701–44
chauvinism an excessive, unthinking devotion to one’s country, named after Nicolas Chauvin of Rochefort, 19th-century French soldier
deriath a witty four-line verse that consists of two rhymed couplets, named after Edmund Derriath Bentely, English writer, 1873–1956
coulomb the basic metric unit of electric charge, named after Charles Augustin de Coulomb, French physicist, 1736–1806
dahlia a genus of herbaceous perennial plants that have showy, brightly colored flowers and tuberous roots, named after Anders Dahl, Swedish botanist, 1751–89
derrick now referring to a hoisting apparatus or crane, formerly describing a gallows, named after a 17th-century English hangman named Demick
diesel an internal-combustion engine ignited by highly compressed air, named after Rudolf Diesel, German mechanical engineer, 1858–1913
Dobbermann pinscher a breed of short-haired, medium-sized dog with a short tail, named after Ludwig Dobbermann, German dog breeder and tax collector, 1834–94
Doppler effect the technical name for the change in the apparent frequency of the waves of sound, light, etc., when there is relative motion between the source and the observer, named after Christian Johann Doppler, Austrian physicist, 1803–53
dracónian of or relating to a very harsh or severe law, measure, or regulation, named after Draco, 7th-century BC Athenian law-giver
dunce a person who is stupid or slow to learn, named after John Duns Scotus, Scottish theologian, c. 1265–1308
Earl Grey a blend of China teas flavoured with oil of bergamot, named after Charles, 2nd Earl Grey, British statesman, 1764–1845
Eiffel Tower the tower in Paris, named after Alexandre Gustave Eiffel, French engineer, 1832–1923
Einsteinium a radioactive chemical element that is produced artificially, named after Albert Einstein, German-born American physicist, 1879–1955
Everest the world’s highest mountain, named after Sir George Everest, surveyor-general of India, 1790–1866
Fallopian tube one of two tubes that connect the uterus to the ovaries in female mammals, named after Gabriel Fallopian, Italian anatomist, 1523–62
Fahrenheit the scale of temperatures in which 32° represents the freezing point of water and 212° the boiling point of water, named after Gabriel Daniel Fahrenheit, German scientist, 1706–1873
Farad the basic metric unit of electrical capacitance, named after Michael Faraday, English physicist and chemist, 1791–1867
Fermium an artificially produced radioactive element, named after Enrico Fermi, Italian-born American physicist, 1901–54
Forsythia a genus of ornamental shrubs of the olive family, named after William Forsyth, British botanist, 1737–1804
Fraunhofer lines numerous dark lines in the sun’s spectrum, named after Joseph von Fraunhofer, German physicist and optician, 1787–1826
Freessia a genus of ornamental sweet-scented South African plants of the iris family, named after Friedrich Heinrich Theodor Freese, German physician, died 1876
Fuchsia a genus of ornamental shrubs and herbs native to Central and South America, named after Leonhard Fuchs, German botanist and physician, 1501–66
Gallup poll a survey of the views of a representative sample of the population, named after George Horace Gallup, American statistician, 1901–84
Galvanize to cover iron or steel with a protective zinc coating; in a derived sense to stimulate into sudden action, named after Luigi Galvani, Italian physician, 1737–98
Gardénia a genus of ornamental tropical shrubs and trees, named after Alexander Garden, Scottish-American botanist, 1730–91
Geiger counter an electronic instrument that is used to measure the presence and intensity of radiation, named after Hans Geiger, German physicist, 1882–1945
gerrymander to divide an area into new electoral districts in order to give one party an unfair advantage, named after Elbridge Gerry, American politician, 1744–1814
Guillotine a device for beheading people, named after Joseph Ignace Guillotin, French physician, 1738–1814
Halley’s comet, named after Edmund Halley, British astronomer, 1656–1742
Heath Robinson of or relating to an absurdly complex design, named after William Heath Robinson, English artist, 1872–1944
Henry the derived metric unit of electric inductance, named after Joseph Henry, American physicist, 1797–1878
Herculean of or relating to a task that requires immense effort or strength, named after Hercules (Greek, Herakles), the son of Zeus and Alcmene, and the greatest and strongest of the Greek demi-gods
Hoover a trademark used to describe a type of vacuum cleaner, named after William Henry Hoover, American businessman, 1849–1932
Jacuzzi a trademark used to describe a system of underwater jets of water that massage the body, named after Candido Jacuzzi, Italian-born engineer, c. 1903–86
JCB the trademark for a type of mechanical earth-mover, named after Joseph Cyril Bamford, English manufacturer, 1916–2001
Joule the metric unit of work or energy, named after James Prescott Joule, English physicist, 1818–89
Kelvin the metric unit of thermodynamic temperature, named after William Thomson Kelvin, 1st Baron Kelvin, Scottish physicist, 1824–1907
Köchel number a serial number in a catalogue of the works of Mozart, named after Ludwig von Köchel, Austrian botanist and cataloguer, 1800–77
Leotard a close-fitting, one-piece garment worn by acrobats, ballet dancers, etc., named after Jules Leotard, French acrobat, 1842–70
Listeria the bacteria that cause listeriosis, a
serious form of food poisoning, named after Joseph Lister, British surgeon, 1827–1912
lobelia a genus of flowers bearing showy blue, red, yellow or white flowers, named after Matthias de Lobel, Flemish botanist and physician, 1538–1616
loganberry the large, sweet purplish-red berry of the upright-growing raspberry plant, named after James Harvey Logan, American lawyer, 1841–1928
Luddite a person who is opposed to industrial innovation, named after Ned Ludd, 18th-century English labourer
macadam compacted layers of small broken stones bound together with tar, asphalt, etc., named after John Loudon McAdam, Scottish engineer, 1756–1836
Machiavellian of or relating to cunning, double-dealing, and opportunist methods, named after Niccolò Machiavelli, Italian political theorist, 1469–1527
Mach number a number that represents the ratio of the speed of a body to the speed of sound in the same medium, named after Ernst Mach, Austrian physicist and philosopher, 1838–1916
mackintosh a kind of raincoat made of rubberized cloth, named after Charles Macintosh, Scottish chemist, 1760–1843
malapropism the unintentional confusion of words that produces a ridiculous effect, named after Mrs Malaprop in the play The Rivals (1775), by the Irish dramatist Richard Brinsley Sheridan, 1751–1816
martinet a strict disciplinarian, named after Jean Martinet, French army officer during the reign of Louis XIV, died 1672
maverick a person who is independent and who does not wish to conform or be identified with a group, named after Samuel Augustus Maverick, American pioneer, 1803–70
Melba toast, peach melba Melba toast (thinly sliced toasted bread) and peach melba (a dessert of peaches, ice-cream, and raspberry melba sauce), named after Dame Nellie Melba, Australian operatic soprano singer, 1861–1931
Mercator projection a form of map projection, named after Gerhardus Mercator (original name Gerhard Kremer), Flemish geographer, 1512–94
mesmerize to fascinate, spellbind, or hypnotize, named after Franz Anton Mesmer, Austrian physician and hypnotist, 1734–1815
Molotov cocktail a crude petrol bomb, named after Vyacheslav Mikhaylovich Molotov (original surname Scriabin), Soviet statesman, 1890–1986
Montessori method an education method in which the creative potential of young children is developed, named after Maria Montessori, Italian physician and educator, 1870–1952
Moog synthesizer the trademark for a type of synthesizer, named after Robert Arthur Moog, American physicist, engineer, and electrician, born 1934
Morse code a telegraphic system of signalling in which letters and numbers are represented by dots and dashes, named after Samuel Finley Breese Morse, American artist and inventor, 1791–1872
narцissism an extreme interest in or love for oneself, named after Narcissus, the beautiful young man in Greek mythology
newton the metric unit of force, named after Sir Isaac Newton, British physicist and mathematician, 1642–1727
ohm the metric unit of electrical resistance, named after Georg Simon Ohm, German physicist, 1787–1854
Pareto principle the 80/20 rule, e.g. 80 per cent of the sales may come from 20 per cent of the customers, named after Vilfredo Federico Pareto, Italian economist and sociologist, 1848–1923
Parkinson’s law which states that work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion, named after Cyril Northcote Parkinson, English historian and author, 1909–93
pasteurize to destroy bacteria in a drink or a food, named after Louis Pasteur, French chemist and bacteriologist, 1822–95
pavlova a meringue cake topped with cream and fruit, named after Anna Pavlova, Russian ballerina, 1885–1931
Peter principle that in a hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to the level of his incompetence, named after Laurence J. Peter, Canadian educator, 1919–90
Peters projection a form of map projection, named after Dr. Arno Peters, German historian, born 1916
platonic of a close relationship between a couple that does not involve sex, named after Plato, Greek philosopher, c. 427–347 BC
Plimsoll line a set of markings on the side of a ship that show the various levels that the ship may safely be loaded to, named after Samuel Plimsoll, English leader of shipping reform, 1824–98
poinsettia the traditional Christmas evergreen plant, named after Joel Roberts Poinsett, American diplomat, 1879–1881

Pulitzer prizes prizes awarded for outstanding achievements in journalism, literature, and music, named after Joseph Pulitzer, Hungarian-born American newspaper publisher, 1847–1911

Pullman the luxurious railway passenger coach, named after George Mortimer Pullman, American inventor, 1831–97

quixotic Don Quixote (of or like) a person who is carried away by the impractical pursuit of romantic ideals and who has extravagant notions of chivalry, named after Don Quixote, hero of the novel Don Quixote de la Mancha (1605, 1615) by the Spanish novelist Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, 1547–1616

Rafflesia the genus of parasitic Asian herbs, named after Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, British colonial administrator, 1781–1826

raglan a loose-fitting coat that has sleeves that extend to the collar without shoulder seams, named after Fitzroy James Henry Somerset, 1st Baron Raglan, British field marshal, 1788–1855

Reuter the news agency, named after Baron Paul Julius von Reuter (original name Israel Beer-Joseph), German-born British, 1816–99

Richter scale a scale for expressing the magnitude of earthquakes, named after Charles Richter, American seismologist, 1900–85

Romeo a romantic lover, named after Romeo, the hero in Shakespeare’s tragedy Romeo and Juliet

Rorschach test a psychological test in which the interpretation by a subject of a series of inkblots reveals aspects of the subject’s personality, named after Hermann Rorschach, Swiss psychiatrist, 1884–1922

Rubik’s cube a puzzle consisting of a cube, each face of which is divided into nine small coloured squares that can rotate around a central square, named after Ernő Rubik, Hungarian designer, sculptor, and architect, born 1944

Rudbeckia a genus of flowers with snowy flowers with yellow rays and dark-brown to black conical centres, named after Olof Rudbeck, Swedish botanist, 1630–1702

rutherford a unit of radioactivity, named after Ernest Rutherford, 1st Baron Rutherford, British physicist, 1871–1937

Ryder Cup the biennial professional golfing match between the USA and Europe, named after Samuel Ryder, English professional golfer, 1859–1936


sadism the pleasure derived from inflicting pain on others, named after Count Donatien Alphonse François de Sade, known as Marquis de Sade, French soldier and writer, 1740–1814

salmonella the rod-shaped bacteria that cause diseases including food poisoning (salmonellosis) in human beings, named after Daniel Eimer-Salmon, American veterinary surgeon, 1850–1914

sandwich the snack consisting of two slices of buttered bread with a filling between, named after John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich, British diplomat, 1718–92

sequoia either of two giant Californian coniferous trees, named after Sequoia, Native American, c. 1770–1843

shrapnel the projectile that contains bullets or fragments of metal and a charge that is exploded before impact, named after Henry Shrapnel, English artillery officer, 1761–1842

siemens the metric unit of electrical conductance, named after Ernst Werner von Siemens, German electrical engineer, 1816–92

silhouette the outline of a dark shape set on a light background, named after Étienne de Silhouette, French politician, 1709–67

simony the practice of buying or selling of church or spiritual benefits or offices, named after Simon Magnus, 1st-century AD sorcerer

sousaphone the large tuba that encircles the player with a forward-facing bell, named after John Philip Sousa, American bandmaster and composer, 1854–1932

spoonerism in which initial sounds of words were accidentally transposed, often with a comical effect, named after the Rev. William Archibald Spooner, English clergyman and scholar, 1844–1930

stetson the wide-brimmed, high-crowned felt hat, named after John Batterson Stebbins, American hat-maker, 1830–1906

tantalize to tease someone by offering some-
thing desirable to view and then withholding it, named after Tantalus, Greek mythical king of Phrygia.

tontine a financial scheme that provides life annuities to a group of subscribers, named after Lorenzo Tonti, Italian banker, 1635-90.

tradescantia a genus of flowering plants, named after John Tradescant, English traveller and gardener, c. 1570-1638.

Turing machine a hypothetical universal computing machine, named after Alan Mathison Turing, English mathematician, 1912-54.

Venn diagram in which circles and other shapes are drawn to overlap at certain points in order to represent mathematical and logical relationships, named after John Venn, English mathematician and logician, 1834-1923.

volt the metric unit of (electric) potential, named after Count Alessandro Volta, Italian physicist, 1745-1827.

Wankel engine a type of internal-combustion engine that has a triangular-shaped rotating piston with slightly convex sides, named after Felix Wankel, German engineer, 1902-88.

watt the metric unit of power, named after James Watt, Scottish engineer and inventor, 1736-1819.

Wellington boot a waterproof rubber boot without fastenings that reaches to the knee, named after Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington, British soldier and statesman, 1769-1852.

wisteria a genus of twining climbing plants with purple flowers, named after Caspar Wistar, American anatomist, 1761-1818.

Zeppelin an airship, especially a large rigid cylindrical airship, named after Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin, German general and aeronautical pioneer, 1838-1917.

equable or equitable? Equable means 'regular, moderate, not given to extremes' and is frequently applied both to climates which are consistently mild and not subject to sudden changes, and to people who are placid and even-tempered. Equable means 'fair, reasonable, impartial': • It was an equitable agreement which both parties found satisfactory.

equal Careful users avoid modifying the word equal, believing it to be incorrect to say that one thing can be more or less equal than another: • All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others (George Orwell, Animal Farm).

equally The word equally should not be followed by as in such sentences as: • She is a brilliant pianist, and her brother is equally talented (not equally as talented).

• The word equally may, however, be replaced by as in the above example, in which case it is stressed.

in the sentence: • This dress is as expensive as that one, the first as should not be preceded or replaced by equally. The sentence can, however, be rephrased as: • The two dresses are equally expensive.

equal to or equal with? When briefly indicating identity, equivalence, or similarity equal is used as a verb with no preposition: • x equals 5 or as an adjective followed by to: • x is equal to 5. In longer constructions, using equal as an adjective, it is preferable to use equal with, rather than equal to: • The Bradford team have gained five points and are now equal with the team from Liverpool. Equal to has the specific meaning of 'capable of meeting the requirements of': • He seemed too young and inexperienced to be equal to the task.

equitable see EQUABLE or EQUITABLE?

• -er see -ee or -er?

• -er or -or? The suffix -er is used to form nouns to indicate an occupation: • lawyer • bricklayer, or an action performed by a person: • Steeplechaser • messenger • inquirer. The suffix -or is used in the same way with other words, normally those formed from Latin roots. Often these are words where there is no English verb base: • sponsor • doctor • author • mentor, but this is not always the case: • actor • investigator • sailor.

• It is not always possible to guess which ending should be used and sometimes both are acceptable: • adviser/advisor • vendor/vender. The -er ending is more frequent and more likely with recently coined nouns and those that do not have Latin roots.

See also -ee or -er?

erogenous Erogenous zones are the parts of the body that are sensitive to sexual stimulation. Note the spelling of the word erogenous: a single r and -gen-, not -gyn- as in misogynist.
erupt or irrupt? These two verbs (and their derived nouns eruption and irruption) are identical in pronunciation but different in meaning. Erupt means 'burst out; come or go out with force', whereas irrupt, a more formal word, means 'burst in; enter with force': • The crowd erupted onto the street. • The police irrupted into the building.

- The verb erupt is also used with reference to volcanoes, with reference to the sudden appearance of a rash on the skin, and in the figurative sense of 'begin suddenly and violently': • Fighting erupted along the border. The verb irrupt should not be used in this sense.

Note the single -t- of erupt and the -r- of irrupt.

escalate Eescalate is a back formation from escalator, and as a vogue word meaning 'expand, rise, intensify' tends to be overused. It is best confined to the description of an upward movement that increases step by step: • Rents have escalated over the last five years. • Officials killed by mine as Tamil attacks escalate (The Times).

Eskimo see INUIT.

esophagus see OESOPHAGUS or ESOPHAGUS?
especially or specially? These adverbs are often used interchangeably, but there is a difference in their meanings. Especially means 'more than usual, in particular, above all': • He was especially hungry. • I hate dogs, especially big ones. Specially means 'specifically, purposely, in this particular way': • The car is specially designed for handicapped people. • I made it specially for you.

- Specially is often used where especially is intended, and sometimes, as in the last example, this might lead to confusion as specially for you might mean 'for you above all' or 'specifically for you'.

esprit de corps The French expression esprit de corps is used in formal contexts to refer to a feeling of team spirit, loyalty, and devotion that unites members of a group.

- The literal meaning of esprit de corps is 'spirit of the body'. Note that it is sometimes written or printed in italics. It is pronounced [espre de kaw].

-ess The use of the feminine suffix -ess is sometimes regarded as patronizing or sexist and is often unnecessary.

- Such nouns as author, poet, sculptor, editor, manager, etc., can be applied to people of either sex, making authoress, poetess, sculptress, edi-

 estimation

tress, and manageress redundant. Actress and hostess are retained in some contexts, although actor and host are generally considered to be of neutral gender. Certain occupational titles, such as waiter and steward, tend to be used as masculine nouns, waitress and stewardess being their feminine equivalents. The suffix -ess is obligatory in such words as princess, duchess, countess and marchioness.

See also NON-SEXIST TERMS: SEXISM.

esential The adjective essential is followed by the preposition to or for: • Money is not essential to [or for] happiness.

essentially Essentially should be used primarily to mean 'basically, inherently, or most importantly': • The play is essentially a tragedy although there is some comic relief.

- It tends sometimes also to be used with a weaker meaning of 'in general terms': • It was essentially a good match, or 'importantly': • Your view isn't essentially different from mine. This usage is disliked by some.

establishment The Establishment refers to the powerful figures in government (especially the civil service), the legal system, the established church, the armed forces, and the City of London, who are thought to control the country: • The Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Lord Chief Justice were among the Establishment figures present. The Establishment (sometimes with a lower-case e) is thought to have a conservative outlook, generally opposing changes to the existing order, and as such is often used as a derogatory term.

- A further meaning of establishment is 'a controlling or influential group': • the pedigree dog establishment.

esthetic see AESTHETIC, ASCETIC or ACETIC?
estimation, estimate or esteem? Estimation is the act of estimating; an estimate is a figure, idea, etc., arrived at by the process of estimation: • an estimate of the time it will take. Esteem, a more formal word, means 'great respect': • He held her in high esteem.

- The noun estimation also means 'opinion' or 'regard': • What is your estimation, is the cause of the problem? • She went down in their estimation when the truth came out.

Misunderestimate is an invalid elaboration of estimate and should be avoided. It attracted attention when used in a speech by US President George W. Bush.
et al. Et al. is an abbreviation of et alii and means 'and other people'. It is used particularly in writings of a formal technical nature to indicate the omission of other names: • Similar findings have been recorded by Jones, Bernstein, et al.

♦ It should not be used in ordinary writing or in speech, and should be used only when a list is specific and does not start with for example or such as.

t. The abbreviation etc. stands for et cetera, which means 'and other things, and so forth': • The college offers several non-academic subjects – home economics, physical education, craft and design, etc.

♦ It is used in technical or informal writing, but in formal writing and so on or and so forth are preferred. One should not write and etc. or use it in a list preceded by for example or such as. There is never any point in writing etc. etc., although it is sometimes used in informal speech.

The correct pronunciation of etc. is [etsep'teə] or [etsep'teə], not [etsep'teə].

etics see -ics.

etnic The original meaning of ethnic is 'classified according to distinctive social characteristics, e.g. race, culture or language': • There are many different ethnic groups in the USA. Ethnic is now used to mean 'belonging to a particular social group, especially a minority one': Shooting continued last night in Sukhumi, . . . more than 24 hours after the start of ethnic clashes in which 11 people have been killed (Daily Telegraph). Because ethnic groups tend to be defined in relation to the majority population it has also come to mean 'belonging to a non-Western culture', 'foreign': • But a great deal of ethnic food is not hot, but spiced, with pronounced flavours (Sunday Times), and 'non-white': • Labour now has three other ethnic MPs (Sunday Times).

etnic cleansing The phrase ethnic cleansing is a euphemism originally applied to the deportation and murder in 1991 of thousands of Muslims and Croats living in Bosnia. It has since been adopted to refer to similar programmes of extermination elsewhere in the world, such as Rwanda and Kurdish Iraq, and is occasionally applied to earlier atrocities of this kind, including the extermination of Jews by the Nazis in the 1930s.

♦ Stephen Burgen (The Guardian) warns against the adoption of euphemisms coined by the perpetrators of atrocities: 'Already some newspapers have started taking ethnic cleansing out of quotation marks, thus moving the phrase one more step along the road to respectability.'

etymology see ENTOMOLOGY or ETYMOLOGY?

euphemisms A euphemism is an inoffensive term that is used as a substitute for one that might give offence. Euphemisms tend to be used particularly when referring to sexual and bodily functions: • private parts (genitals) • smallest room (toilet) • pass water (urinate), and to death: • She passed away. • I lost my wife two years ago.

♦ Some euphemisms have arisen out of genuine feelings of sensitivity, but many are an attempt to cover up something reprehensible: • the Nazi Final Solution (mass extermination of the Jews) • being economical with the truth (lying).

The invention of new euphemisms in the business and professional worlds is becoming almost an art form. • At one international computer company the accepted wording for falling behind is 'achieving schedule overrun' (Sunday Times). • [An American] hospital recently announced the relapse of an important patient by saying he 'did not fully achieve his wellness potential'. He later experienced a 'terminal episode' . . . previously known as death (The Times).

Eurasian The meaning of Eurasian has changed over recent decades. Formerly it was used to describe a person of mixed British and Indian parentage. Today it is used more widely to refer to a person of mixed white and Asian parentage: • Politicians are becoming increasingly aware of the needs of the country's Eurasian population.

Euro- Although the United Kingdom is part of Europe, British people have traditionally spoken of Europe to mean all the continent apart from the United Kingdom. When United Kingdom membership of the European Community was mooted, it was often referred to as going into Europe, and Europe is now quite often used as a synonym for the European Union.

♦ The prefix Euro- is sometimes used in words which are connected with Europe in general: • Eurocommunism • Eurobond • Eurovision • Eurobank but more often with those having connections with the European Union • Euro-sceptic •
evade, evasion see AVOID, EVADE or ELUDE?
evangelical or evangelistic? Evangelism is the activity of declaring the Christian gospel in order to bring about conversion to Christianity. Evangelistic is the adjective used to describe such activities: • An evangelistic mission to the city. Evangelical describes people and beliefs that emphasize salvation by faith in the death of Jesus Christ, personal conversion, and the authority of the Bible: • Evangelical Christians • an evangelical church.
• Evangelical is also used in the extended sense of ‘very enthusiastic’: • speak with evangelical fervour.

even The position of the word even in a sentence can influence its meaning. Compare the following sentences and their implications: • Even I like opera on television (so other people would like it still more).
• I like even opera on television (presumably I would prefer other things other than opera). • I like opera even on television (though it is inferior on television). In formal writing it is best to put even before the word it modifies, in order to make the meaning unambiguous although in speech it is often more natural to put even before the verb: • He doesn’t even stop working on holiday.

eventuate Eventuate is used, usually in formal contexts, to mean ‘result’: • If the proposed merger takes place, this might eventuate in the new company having a monopoly of the market. It is disliked by many people as pompous and affected, and conveying nothing that is not conveyed by simpler and more usual words.

ever The use of ever with superlatives in such constructions as: • the largest pie ever • his fastest speed ever, is disliked by some people as they feel that ever includes the future, as well as the past. The usage is well-established, but the criticism can be met by changing the constructions slightly: • the largest pie ever baked • his fastest speed to date the fastest he has ever run.
• The expressions ever so and ever such as intensives: • He’s ever so clever. • It’s ever such a nice house should be confined to informal contexts, and ever so without an adjective or adverb following: • Thanks ever so is better avoided.

On whether to write whatever or what ever, wherever or where ever, etc., in such sentences as:
• What ever did he say next? • Whatever you travel you’ll find businesses that accept our credit card, see WHATEVER or WHAT EVER?
every Every is used with singular nouns and all related words should be in the singular form: • Every machine is equipped with a safety device. The temptation to use plurals arises when one wishes to avoid such gender-specific constructions as: • I hope every committee member has remembered to bring his agenda. Rather than use the controversial their agendas or the rather clumsy his or her agenda it is better to rephrase the sentence: • I hope all committee members have remembered to bring a copy of the agenda with them.
See also EACH or EVERY?
everybody or everyone? The pronoun everybody and its synonym everyone are interchangeable in all contexts.
• Both are used with a singular verb but are sometimes followed by a plural personal pronoun or possessive adjective (see they): • Everybody/Everyone has paid their fare.

Note the difference between the one-word compound everyone and the more specific two-word form every one, both of which may be applied to people: • Everyone knew the answer.
• Every one of the contestants knew the answer. Only the two-word compound is used of things: • I bought six glasses and every one was cracked.
everyday or every day? Everyday means ‘completely ordinary’ and is used as an adjective or (more occasionally) a noun:
• her everyday clothes • not part of the everyday. Every day can be used as an adverb, meaning ‘daily’, and as a noun, meaning ‘each day’: • Brush your teeth every day. • He starts every day with a half-hour exercise routine.

evince Evince is a formal verb meaning ‘show clearly; make apparent’: • Her writing evinces keen perception and skills of observation. Some careful users believe it should be applied only to qualities, not to attitudes or emotions, although it is generally acceptable in such applications.
ex As a prefix, ex- means ‘former’ or ‘outside’: • the ex-chairman • an ex-directory telephone number. It is usually attached with a hyphen. The noun ex, meaning ‘former spouse’ or ‘former partner’, should be restricted to informal contexts: • She had a letter from her ex this morning.

• The preposition ex is used in financial contexts in the sense of ‘without’ or ‘excluding’: • ex interest • £150 ex VAT. In commercial contexts it means ‘from’: • ex stock • ex warehouse • ex works. The phrase ex stock is sometimes misinterpreted as ‘no longer in stock’, through confusion with the prefix ex- in the sense of ‘former’.

exaggerate This word, meaning ‘represent as greater than is true’, is sometimes misspelt. Note the -gg- and single -r-, as in stagger.

See also OVEREXAGGERATE.

exalt or exult? Exalt means ‘elevate’ or ‘praise’; exult means ‘rejoice’ or ‘triumph’: • She was exalted to the position of sales director. • to exalt a hero • He exulted at his success. • to exult in victory.

• Both words are formal and more frequently found in their derived forms, such as the adjectives exalted and exultant and the nouns exaltation and exultation.

exceed see ACCEDE or EXCEED?

excel The verb excel is followed by the preposition at or in: • She excels at [or in] creative writing.

except It is usually better to use except rather than except for: • We all went for a walk except Flora. The exceptions are at the beginning of a sentence: • Except for Stuart, we are all under 40, and when a whole statement is being qualified and except for means if it were not for: • The room was silent except for the occasional squeak of a pen.

• Except for is also used with the meaning ‘without; but for’: • I wouldn’t have got this far except for your support, but this is an informal use and some careful users dislike it.

Excepting (meaning ‘except, excluding’) is considered acceptable only when used after ‘always’, ‘not’, ‘only’, or ‘without’: • It was the happiest day of her life, not excepting her wedding day.

Except as a preposition should be followed by the object form: • except me [not I] • except him [not he].

See also ACCEPT or EXCEPT?

exceptional or exceptionable? Exceptional means ‘out of the ordinary; uncommon’: • Apart from the exceptional quiet day, we’ve been kept busy all month, and ‘unusually good’: • This is an exceptional wine. In British English exceptional is often used of people to mean ‘above average; superior; gifted’: • an exceptional student • an exceptional musician. In American English, however, exceptional is applied to children of both below and above average ability, and is now applied particularly to physically challenged children, or those with learning difficulties. Exceptional should not be confused with exceptionable, which means ‘objectionable; something to which exception might be taken’: • His words were not offensive in themselves, but there was something in his manner that we found exceptionable.

excess see ACCESS or EXCESS?

exclamation mark Exclamation marks are used to indicate strong feeling or urgency: • Hurrah! • Go away! • Help! Exclamation marks may come at the end of a sentence, as a substitute for a full stop, or at the end of a quotation, within quotation marks: • ‘Ouch!’ he cried. Occasionally, they may occur in the middle of a sentence.

• Exclamation marks are used after interjections, oaths, and words representing loud noises: • Oh! • Oaw! • Crash! • Damn! • Gracious!, after alarms and commands: • Look out! • Quiet! • Fire!, and after insults and curses: • You bastard! • Rat in hell!

They are used after various exclamations expressing surprise, indignation, pleasure, or displeasure, often starting with how or what, and some which have the form of questions: • How beautiful! • What fun! • What a mess! • How we laughed!

• Aren’t you silly! They are also used after longer sentences when strong emotion is being expressed: • I’m absolutely sick of the lot of you!

There are no words or utterances that always need an exclamation mark. The presence or absence of one indicates the intonation required when reading a word or sentence. • You can’t be serious! would be read with a different intonation from: • You can’t be serious? or: • You can’t be serious.

Exclamation marks should be used sparingly, and never doubled or trebled. The excessive use of exclamation marks in writing, particularly when used in an attempt to create an atmosphere of excitement, fun, or humour, generally has a negative effect on the reader.
exclamations Exclamations are words, phrases, or sentences that express a strong feeling, such as surprise, anger, shock, excitement, etc.: • Go! • Get out! • Oh dear! They are always followed by an EXCLAMATION MARK.

- In writing, exclamations are best restricted to direct speech. They may also be used in informal letters, but they become less effective if overused.

exclude or preclude? Exclude means 'leave out' or 'prevent from entering'; preclude is used in formal contexts and means 'make impossible' or 'prevent from happening': • A number of items were excluded from the list. • Lack of resources precluded further research.

The two verbs should not be confused.

executive An executive is a senior businesswoman or businesswoman. Many people object to the increasing use of the word in the sense of 'fashionable', 'luxurious', or 'expensive', describing items that are designed to appeal to those who aspire to the social level of an executive or the (supposed) high income of an executive: • an exclusive development of executive homes • an executive bathroom.

- The adjectival use of the noun to describe items that are intended for or used by the executives of a company is more acceptable: • the executive restaurant • an executive jet.

exercise or exorcise? These two words should not be confused. Exercise is a noun and verb with various meanings, including 'a set of energetic movements', 'a short piece of school work', and, in formal contexts, 'make use of': • You should take more exercise. • He exercised his right to remain silent. The verb exorcise means 'expel evil spirits from': • The house had been exorcised.

- Both words are sometimes misspelt with -xc- in place of the -x-. Note also the -ise endings: exercise is one of the few words in which -ise cannot be replaced by -ize (see -ize or -ise?). Exorcise has the variant spelling exorcize, but the -ise ending is sometimes preferred by those who use the -ize form for other verbs.

The two words are not identical in pronunciation. The unstressed -or- in the middle of exorcise is pronounced [or-], whereas the unstressed -er- in the middle of exercise has the weak sound of the final -er- of baker, lumber, etc.

ex gratia An ex gratia payment is one that is given as a favour, rather than because it is legally necessary.

- The literal meaning of the phrase ex gratia is 'by favour' and it is pronounced [iks grayshā].

exhausting or exhaustive? Exhausting means 'extremely tiring'; • I find Christmas shopping exhausting. It should not be confused with exhaustive, which means 'thorough; comprehensive; considering all possibilities': • They made exhaustive enquiries but to no avail. • This is an exhaustive study, covering every aspect of the subject.

exhilarate This word, meaning 'thrill or excite': • an exhilarating experience, is sometimes misspelt. Frequent errors include the omission of the -h- and the substitution of -ler- for -lar-.

existential Existential usually means 'relating to existence, particularly human existence': • an existential statement, or 'grounded in human existence; empirical': • an existential argument for the existence of God. It is also sometimes used to mean 'existentialist, based on existentialist philosophy': • existential anguish • Sartre's existential theories.

- It is also sometimes used as a vague word to mean 'referring to a subjective intellectual viewpoint', but such use is generally considered pretentious.

ex officio The Latin phrase ex officio is used in formal contexts to describe a right or rank to which someone is entitled because of his or her occupation or position: • The chairman is an ex officio member of all the subcommittees.

- The phrase literally means 'by virtue of one's office'.

exorbitant This word, meaning 'excessive': • an exorbitant price to pay, is sometimes misspelt. There is no h in the spelling, unlike exhilarate.

exorcise see exercise or exorcise?

exotic The original meaning of exotic is 'from another country, not native to the place it is found': • exotic flowers. By this definition the potato would be an exotic vegetable in Britain but it is never spoken of as such, because exotic is now almost always used with the meaning of 'unusual, excitingly different, interestingly foreign': • exotic food • exotic dances • travel to distant exotic lands.
expatriate The word expatriate, meaning 'a person who is living in a country that is not his or her native country', is sometimes misspelt. Note the spelling of the ending of this word: -ate, not -ot as in patriot.

expeditious or expedient? Expedious and expedient come from the same root, but have quite different meanings. Expedi-
tious means 'speedy; efficient': • Our courier service is the most expeditious method of sending parcels. Expedient means 'conven-
ient for a particular situation or aim': • It would not be expedient to change the law at the present time.

expedient is associated with practical action and often also a concern for self-interest rather than moral considerations: • You can't learn too soon that the most useful thing about a principle is that it can always be sacrificed to expediency (W. Somerset Maugham, The Circle).

explicable In the traditional pronunciation of this word, which means 'able to be explained': • no explicable reason for their behaviour, the stress was on the first syllable [eksplikəbl]. It is now more usual and perfectly acceptable to stress the second syllable [iksplikəbl].

See also STRESS.

explicate Explicate means 'explain in detail; analyse and explore the implications of': • This series of lectures aims to explicate Kant's critical philosophy and explore its in-
fluence on German idealism. It is a formal word, usually confined to intellectual contexts, and it is pretentious to use it merely as a synonym for explain.

explicit or implicit? Explicit means 'clear; unambiguous, stated or shown in a direct manner': • He gave them explicit instructions: so there was no question of their making a mistake. Implicit means 'implied; under-
stood although not directly expressed': • He detected an implicit criticism in her words, and with 'reservation; unquestioning': • I have implicit faith in your organisational abilities.

Because explicit is often used in phrases like: • explicit scenes of sex and violence, some people now use the word to mean 'frankly portraying (usually) sexual material': • It is very explicit and is not suitable for family viewing. It would be preferable to say explicitly sexual or sexually explicit, if that is what is meant.

exquisite Exquisite, meaning 'very delicate and beautiful': • exquisite carvings, may be pronounced in two ways. Some users pre-
fer the stress to fall on the first syllable [ekkwizit]. Other users find this pronunci-
ation slightly affected and prefer to stress the second syllable [ikkwizit].

• Overuse of this word is disdied by many users.

extant or extinct? Extant, a formal word, means 'surviving' or 'still in existence': • Seven of Sophocles' plays are extant. • an extant law. Extinct is usually applied to a species of animal or plant that has died out or to a volcano that is no longer active: • The African elephant is in danger of becoming extinct. The two adjectives are virtually opposite in meaning.

extempore or impromptu? These two words have similar meanings but are not quite interchangeable. Both are applied to speeches and performances which are not rehearsed in advance. However, extempore suggests that nothing has been memorized or written down beforehand, although the speaker or performer may have thought about the content in advance: • He never wrote his sermons down but preached extem-
po. Impromptu suggests something improvised on the spur of the moment, with no prior notice: • She was surprised to be asked to address them but managed a splendid im-
promptu speech.

extemporize or temporize? To extem-
porize is to act, make a speech, play music, etc., without preparation; to temporize (a rarer word) is to gain time by delaying, stalling, or being evasive: • He temporized an accompaniment on the piano. • She tempor-
ized, being unable to think of a reasonable excuse. The two verbs should not be con-
fused.

• Note the spellings, especially the -or- in the middle, unlike the -er ending of temper.

extensive or extended? Extensive means 'large' or 'widespread'; extended means 'lengthened in time or space': • an extensive search • an extended contract. Both adjectives may be applied to the same noun: • an extensive discussion covers a wide range of subjects; • an extended discussion goes on for longer than usual or longer than planned.

exterior, external or extraneous? Exter-
ior means 'on the outside; relating to the
outside: • The house needs some minor exterior repairs. • Beneath his charming exterior he has a cold and selfish nature. External means 'outwardly visible; suitable for the outside; coming from the outside; not essential': • He has a few external injuries. • This ointment is for external use only. • The paper will be marked by the external examiner. • Do not be misled by these external details. Extrinsic means 'from the outside; not essential or relevant to the issue': • We try to impart our values to our children but they are influenced by extraneous pressures. • Let's concentrate on the main issue and ignore those extraneous points.

**extinct** see **EXTANT** or **EXTINCT**

**extract** or **extricate**? Both these verbs have the sense of 'remove' or 'withdraw', but extricate is more formal and specifically refers to disentanglement or setting free from a difficult situation: • to extract a tooth • to extract information • to extricate oneself from a complex relationship • to extricate a ball from a thorn bush.

**extraordinary** This word, meaning 'unusual or exceptional': • an extraordinary memory for details, is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent mistake being the omission of the first a. Remember the two elements of the word: extra plus ordinary.

**extrapolate** Apart from specialized mathematical use, extrapolate is usually applied to the estimation or prediction of unknown factors by the examination, analysis, and extension of known data and past experience: • We can extrapolate from the existing figures and our knowledge of the previous trends in mobility and birth control to produce an estimate of the populations of major cities in twenty years' time. Careful users, however, are aware that this word is in danger of overuse.

**extricate** see **EXTRACT** or **EXTRICATE**

**extrinsic** see **INTRINSIC** or **EXTRINSIC**

**extrovert** or **introvert**? Extrovert and introvert are terms coined by the psychologist Jung that are now in general use. Extroverts are people who are more concerned with their surroundings than with their own inner selves; they are generally sociable, outgoing, and confident: • He is an extrovert and enjoys nothing better than a noisy, crowded party. Introverts are primarily concerned with their own mental and emotional lives. They are withdrawn and quiet, and prefer reflection to activity: • She tends to be an introvert and is happiest in her own company.

The original spelling was extravert, and this is still more frequently used than extrovert in American English. The spelling extrovert was formed by analogy with introvert and is now standard in British English.

**exuberant** This adjective is sometimes misspelt, a common error being the insertion of -A- after the -ve-. Note also the -ant ending.

**exult** see **EXALT** or **EXULT**
façade This word, which means 'front', as in: • the palace's ornate façade, is usually spelt with a cedilla under the e in British English.
- The spelling is sometimes anglicized by dropping the cedilla, but the French pronunciation [fásad] is retained.

face or face up to? Some users object to face up to as an unnecessary extension of the verb face, meaning 'confront' or 'accept', but there is a slight difference in sense and usage between the two: to face up to one's punishment suggests a greater degree of effort and courage than to face one's punishment.
- The verb face often requires qualification: • He faced death with equanimity. • They face the future with hope and fear. Face up to, on the other hand, conveys the subject's feelings of resignation, determination, etc., by implication: • I will just have to face up to the prospect of redundancy.

facetious This word, which means 'jocular' or 'flippan', as in: • a facetious remark, is sometimes misspelt.
- It is worth remembering that facetious is one of the few words in the English language in which each vowel appears just once and in alphabetical order.

facia see FASA.

facile in the sense of 'easily achieved' or 'superficial', the adjective facile is often used in a derogatory manner: facile prose is produced with little effort and lacks substance; a facile argument is glib and lacks sound reasoning.
- The usual pronunciation of facile is [fazl], rhyming with mile; the alternative pronunciation [fazl], rhyming with mill, is an accepted but rarer variant.

facilitate The verb facilitate means 'make easier'; it should not be used as a synonym for 'help' or 'assist': • His cooperation facilitated our task. • We were helped [not facilitated] in our task by the information he gave us.
- Facilitate is largely restricted to formal contexts.

facility or faculty! These two words are sometimes confused in the sense of 'ability'. Facility is ease or skill that is often gained from familiarity; faculty is more likely to denote a natural power or aptitude: • a facility for public speaking • a faculty for understanding complex scientific concepts.
- Both words have additional meanings: A faculty is a division of a college or university; • the faculty of arts.

A facility provides the means for doing something; with this sense, referring to buildings or equipment, the word is usually found in the plural: • conference facilities • sports facilities • facilities for the visually impaired.

The extended use of facility or facilities as synonyms for 'premises', 'factory', or 'shop' (or, euphemistically, for 'toilet'—as in: • May I use your facilities?—or 'hospital') is avoided by careful users.

factious or fractious? These adjectives are sometimes confused. Factious means 'showing or caused by faction or dissension': • the factious rancour in her voice. Fractious is used more frequently and means 'irritable' or 'unruly': • tired and fractious children.

factious or fictitious? Both these adjectives mean 'not genuine', but they differ in usage and application and should not be confused. Factitious, which is largely confined to formal contexts, means 'artificially created' or 'unnatural'; • factitious enthusiasm. Fictitious means 'false' or 'invented': • a fictitious address.

See also FICTIONAL or FICTIOUS.

factor A factor is a contributory element, condition, or cause; many people object to its frequent use as a synonym for 'point', 'thing', 'fact', 'event', 'constituent', etc.: • A rise in the cost of raw materials and a fall in demand were important factors in the company's collapse. • We must discuss all the relevant points [not factors].
faculty see FACULTY or FACULTY?

Fahrenheit Note the spelling of this word, which should always begin with a capital letter.

See also CELSIUS, CENTIGRADE or FAHRENHEIT?

fail Some people dislike the frequent use of the verb fail as a simple negative: • Those who fail to pay the tax will be imprisoned. The principal meaning of fail is 'try unsuccessfully (to do something)'; the verb should not be used with reference to something that is deliberately not done.
• This misuse of fail can lead to ambiguity: • The driver of the car failed to stop may mean that the driver applied the brakes ineffectively, or that he or she made no attempt to stop.

faint or feint? Faint means 'not clear' or 'not strong'; it is also a noun or verb referring to a brief loss of consciousness. Feint, derived from the verb feign, refers to an action or movement intended to distract or mislead: • On hearing the news she fell to the floor in a faint. • The boxer made a feint with his left fist then struck with his right.
• The confusion between these two words may be due to the use of feint by printers and stationers to denote the fine lines on ruled paper. In this sense either spelling is acceptable, faint being by far the more frequent.

fair or fare? These words, which are pronounced the same, are occasionally confused. The noun fair variously refers to an event with amusements, sideshows, stalls, etc. or a commercial exhibition: • That was the week the fair came to town. It should not be confused with fare, which means 'a fee for travel', 'passenger in a taxi', or 'choice of food or entertainment': • He paid the fare and climbed on the coach. • The driver carried just two fares that evening. • This restaurant offers the usual fare.

fait accompli A fait accompli is something that has already been done and that therefore cannot be changed: • She was afraid he might not agree to her selling the car, so she decided to present him with a fait accompli (i.e. She did not tell him until she had sold the car).
• Of French origin, the phrase is sometimes written or printed in italics in English texts. The plural is formed by adding s to both words: • fait accomplis. The anglicized pronunciation is [fayt əköm-pli].

fallible or fallacious? These two adjectives, both of which are formal, are sometimes confused. Fallible means 'capable of making an error' or 'imperfect'; fallacious means 'containing an error' or 'illogical': • All human beings are fallible. • fallacious reasoning. The adjective fallible may be applied to people; fallacious is applied only to abstract nouns.
• Both adjectives are derived from the Latin verb fallere 'to deceive'. Note the spelling of fallible and its opposite infallible, particularly the -ible ending. The first syllable is pronounced [fæl-], to rhyme with pair, not [fæw-], as in fail.

false friends False friends are words in different languages that appear similar but in fact have different meanings. Examples of potentially confusing pairs include the English gusto ('enthusiasm') and the Italian gusto ('taste') and the English assist (to help) and the French assister (to attend).

falsehood, falseness or falsity? All three nouns are formal and are derived from the adjective false, meaning 'untrue', 'not genuine', or 'disloyal'. Falsehood and falsity are largely restricted to the first sense: • the difference between truth and falsehood/falsity.
A falsehood is a lie; a falsity is an act of deception. Falseness may be used in all three senses, occurring most frequently in the sense of 'disloyalty': • the falseness of his statement/name/behaviour.

fantastic The use of fantastic as a synonym for 'excellent' or 'very great' is best restricted to informal contexts: • a fantastic holiday. • fantastic wealth.
• Fantastic, related to the noun fantasy, originally meant 'fantastic' or 'unreal': • a fantastic tale. The word should be used with care, however, even in these senses, to avoid misinterpretation through association with its informal usage.

FAQ see NETSPEAK.

Far East The countries of East Asia and South-East Asia were formerly known as the Far East, but this term is now considered outdated. East Asia and South-East Asia are the preferred terms.

fare see FAIR or FARE?
farther, farthest, further or furthest? In the sense of 'more (or most) distant or advanced', as the comparative and superlative of far, farther is interchangeable with further and farthest with furthest. • London is farther/further from Manchester than it is from Bristol. • Which of the three can run the farthest/furthest?

Some users restrict farther and farthest to physical distance, using further and furthest for more figurative senses: • the farthest country • further from the truth.

In the sense of 'additional', farther is more acceptable than farther. • further supplies • further questions. Further is also preferred in certain set phrases, such as: further education • until further notice • Further to your letter of . . .

Further is not interchangeable with further when the latter is a verb, meaning 'advance' or 'promote': • to further one's career.

fascia The noun fascia may be spelt facia, without the -i-, but many careful users prefer fascia, the spelling of the Latin noun from which the word is derived. The word is pronounced [fəˈsɪʃə].

fascinate This word, meaning 'attract and capture the interest of', as in fascinating tales about her experiences in China, is sometimes misspelt. The most frequent error is the confusion of the -i-. • The term originates from the Latin fascinare 'to bewitch'.

fast-forward Some people dislike the use of the word fast-forward, normally applied to video recorders, cassette players, etc., as a verb and adjective in figurative contexts: • Fast-forwarding through the years (Sunday Times) • Fast-forward reviews dependent on the index (The Guardian).

fast lane The fast lane (or fast track) is the quickest and most competitive way to success. People who are in the fast lane or in the fast track or who are described as fast-lane or fast-track have great ambitions, are involved in a lot of intense hectic activity, and are promoted rapidly: • He tells Carol Price how he copes with the critics, the fame, the fortune and a career in the fast lane (TV Times) • fast-track executives. These fashionable modern expressions should not be overused and are best restricted to informal contexts.

The expressions derive from literal senses: the fast lane of a motorway is for drivers who want to overtake slower cars and a fast horse-racing track is one on which the horses race at high speeds.

fast-moving This expression is often used in commerce and advertising to describe products that sell quickly: • one of the world's most successful manufacturers and marketers of fast-moving consumer goods (Sunday Times).

Fast-moving is also used in similar contexts to create the impression of an enterprise up-to-date company: • one of Britain's most innovative and fast-moving building societies. Although these usages are widely accepted in the business world, they may not be understood by lay people and are best avoided in more general contexts.

fast track see FAST LANE.

fatal or fateful? Fatal means 'causing death or ruin'; fateful means 'decisively important': • a fatal illness • a fatal mistake • their fateful meeting • that fateful night.

Both words are related to fate: fatal originally meant 'decreed by fate'; fateful means 'controlled by fate'.

In its extended sense of 'having momentous and disastrous effects', fatal is sometimes interchangeable with fateful: • a fatal/fateful decision. Fatal should not be used in this sense if there is a possibility of misinterpretation: • a fateful journey may change one's life; a fatal journey may end in death.

It is also worth remembering that the consequences of something fateful can be good, although the word is very rarely used in this sense.

fate or fête? Fate means 'destiny' or 'death': • She met her fate without flinching. It should not be confused with fête, which denotes a celebration or fund-raising festivity: • There were hundreds of people at the fête.

See also FÊTE.

Note that both words are pronounced [fet].

faun or fawn? A faun is a wood spirit of classical mythology: • The goddess was surrounded by fauns. It should not be confused with fawn, denoting a young deer: • The hunter killed a fawn with his first arrow.

Note that both words are pronounced [fɛn].

faux The French word faux, meaning 'artificial' or 'imitation', has appeared with increasing frequency over recent years in discussions of contemporary fashion: • faux marble • faux pearls. It is pronounced [fwa].
fau{x pas A faux pas is a social blunder: • Inviting her ex-husband to the party was a faux pas.

* Of French origin, the phrase literally means 'false step'. It is occasionally written or printed in italics in English texts. The plural form is the same as the singular: • faux pas. The anglicized pronunciation is [fo pah].

fawn see FAUN or FAWN 2.

fax The word fax, short for facsimile (a system for transmitting documents telegraphically), has established itself in the English language as a noun (referring to the system of transmission, the machine used for transmission, or the document transmitted) and as a verb: • by fax • a combined fax, photocopier, and answering machine • fax number • a fax from head office • I faxed the details to the agency. This abbreviation is acceptable in most contexts.

* Fax is also used as a respelling of the plural noun facts, as in the trade names Cofax and Filofax. This usage is less acceptable and may be confused with the sense of 'facsimile'; it is best restricted to informal contexts.

faze or phase! Faze is a verb, meaning 'worry' or 'daunt': • She was not fased by the accusation. Phase is a noun, meaning 'stage': • the next phase of the development • He went through a rebellious phase in his early teens, or a verb, often found in the phrasal forms phase in/out, meaning 'introduce/withdraw gradually': • The benefit will be phased out over a period of five years.

• Faze is regarded by some people as an Americanism and is best restricted to informal contexts.

Compare the spelling of phase, particularly the ph and s, with that of faze, which is spelt exactly as it sounds.

fearful or fearsome? Both adjectives can mean 'frightened' or 'frightening', but fearful is the more frequent and principally used in the sense of 'frightened': • fearful of what might happen • a fearsome sight.

* Either adjective may also be used in informal contexts as an intensifier, meaning 'extremely bad': • I had a fearful cold. • fearsome weather.

feasible The use of feasible to mean 'probable', 'likely', or 'plausible' is avoided by many careful users, especially in formal contexts, where the word is restricted to its original sense of 'practicable' or 'capable of being done': • The committee decided that the project was feasible.

• In informal usage, feasible now shares the double meaning of possible, describing something that can be done or something that might happen, and is therefore equally ambiguous: • Raising prices is a feasible solution to the problem.

* Note the spelling of the word: feasible ends in -ible, not -able.

feature The verb feature is best avoided where have, include, display, appear, etc., may be more appropriate: • a new leisure centre, featuring squash and badminton courts and an indoor swimming pool with fumbles. It is principally used in the entertainment world: • The concert will feature such stars as Britney Spears and Whitney Houston.

• Both as a noun and as a verb, feature should be reserved for what is prominent, distinctive, characteristic, or important: • The spiral staircase is a feature of the house, which also has [not features] central heating, double glazing, and fitted carpets.

February This month name causes problems of spelling and pronunciation, the most frequent being the omission of the first r.

• The full pronunciation of the word is [fribroʊ]. In informal speech, however, the simplified pronunciation [fibrə] and [fibrən] are often heard. The first of these is more acceptable than the second.

feedback The use of feedback as a synonym for 'response' or 'reaction' is disliked by some people, who prefer to restrict the term to its scientific or technical usage.

* In science and technology, feedback is the return of part of the output of a system, device, or process to its input, the most familiar example being the high-pitched whine heard when the output from a loudspeaker returns to the microphone.

Both in scientific contexts and in general usage, feedback often leads to modification: • We must try to get as much feedback as possible from the public to see if our ideas are being successfully put over. • Feedback from customers helps us choose the most practical design.

feel Some people dislike the use of the noun feel in the sense of 'impression' or 'quality', as in the phrases a nice feel about it, a different feel about it, etc.: • The car has a strange feel about it.

• Such expressions may be more succinctly
worded by using the verb feel; • The car feels strange.

**feel-good factor** The phrase feel-good factor refers to a feeling of optimism amongst the general public about the state of the nation, for example the economic situation: • The feel-good factor — as it has come to be known — has plummeted since the time of the General Election (Daily Telegraph). The phrase is disliked by some people and should not be overused.

**feet** see FOOT or FEET?

**feint** see FAINT or FEINT?

**fellow** The word fellow may be combined with other nouns to denote a person in the same category: • fellow passengers are the people with whom one is travelling; • fellow workers are people who work in the same place. The two words are sometimes hyphenated in British English: • fellow-students • fellow-sufferers.

See also HYPHEN 2.
 • A fellow-traveller is someone who sympathizes with the aims of a political party (especially the Communist Party), but is not actually a member of it.

**female or feminine** The adjective female refers to the sex of a person, animal, or plant; it is the opposite of MALE: • a female giraffe • female reproductive cells. Feminine is applied only to people (or their attributes) or to words (see GENDER); it is the opposite of MASCULINE: • feminine charms.

 • With reference to people, female is used only of the childbearing sex; it is used to distinguish women or girls from men or boys but has no further connotations: • There are more female students than male students at the college. Care should be taken, however, in using the term female in certain contexts, as it may be considered denigrating or condescending, in such cases it may be better to use woman instead: • a woman doctor.

See also WOMAN.

Feminine, on the other hand, may be used of both sexes; it refers to characteristics, qualities, etc., that are considered typical of women or are traditionally associated with women: • a feminine hairstyle • a feminine voice. Note that some inanimate objects are conventionally considered feminine, among them ships and cars (although an official decision was taken in 2002 to the effect that ships were henceforth to be treated as genderless): • She's/it's a beautiful vessel. • She comes very smoothly.

Feminine is occasionally confused with feminist, which refers to the movement or belief (feminism) that women should have the same rights, opportunities, etc., as men, particularly in economic, political, and social fields. A feminist is a person who supports feminism, especially someone who is actively trying to bring about change: • She regards herself as a staunch feminist.

For names of female animals see table at ANIMALS. For female, male, and neutral (gender-inclusive) terms for people see table at NON-SEXIST TERMS.

**ferment or foment?** These two verbs are virtually interchangeable in the sense of 'stir up': • to foment/ferment trouble.

 • This figurative sense is now the most frequent use of foment; in medical contexts it retains its original meaning of 'bathe or apply warmth to'.

The principal meaning of ferment, however, is 'undergo fermentation', referring to the chemical reaction involved in the formation of alcohol. Its figurative usage is an extension of this sense.

Confusion may be caused by the identical pronunciation of the two words (foment); they may be more clearly distinguished, if necessary, by using the variant pronunciation of foment [fəʊmɪnt].

**fêté** This word, used as a noun or verb, is usually spelt with a circumflex accent over the first e in British English.

 • The word may be pronounced to rhyme with gate or get, the first of these being the more frequent.

See also FATE or FÊTE?

**feât or foêtâd?** Both spellings of this adjective, which describes something that has a very unpleasant smell, are acceptable. The spelling feât is preferred in British English and is standard in American English.

See also -ae and -ê-

 • The first syllable of feât may be pronounced with a short e [feître] or with a long e [feêtâd]; foêtâd is usually pronounced [foêtâd].

**fêtus** see FœTUS or FETUS?

**few** The difference between few and a few is one of expectation or attitude rather than number; both expressions mean 'some, but not many': • They brought few books; • They brought a few books.

 • The first of these sentences suggests that more
books were expected; the second, that no books were expected. The actual number of books may be the same in both cases.

Few has negative force, contrasting with many; a few has positive force, contrasting with none: • I have many acquaintances but few friends. • There are no pears left, but there are a few apples.

The same principles may be applied to little and a little: • I added little salt to the soup. • I added a little salt to the soup.

For the distinction between (a) few and (a) little see FEWER or LESS?

fewer or less? Fewer, the comparative of few, means 'a smaller number of'; less, the comparative of little, means 'a smaller amount or quantity of': • fewer cars • less unemployment. The general rule is that fewer (or few) is used with plural nouns and less (or little) with singular nouns, whether the nouns are concrete or abstract: • fewer pleasures • few chairs • less wood • little hope • fewer noises • less noise.

The use of less in place of fewer occurs widely in informal speech and also, occasionally, in more formal contexts: • Please remember, on Tuesdays and Thursdays there are less queues in the afternoon (Post Office advertisement, The Guardian). Many people find this usage unacceptable in formal speech and writing.

The same principles apply to the phrases fewer than and less than: • fewer than four people • less than a pint of milk. However, plural units of measurement, time, money, etc., are regarded as singular in such cases: • It took less than ten seconds. • He earned less than £50 last week.

ff, see cf, or ff?

fiancé or fiancée? An engaged woman's future husband is her fiancé; an engaged man's future wife is his fiancée.

• The feminine form is sometimes misspelt, the second e being dropped in error.

Unlike some other words of French origin, fiancé and fiancée are always written with an acute accent over the (first) e.

The pronunciation of both words is identical (fonsay).

fictional or fictitious? Fictional means 'of fiction' or 'not factual'; fictitious means 'false' or 'not genuine': • a fictional detective • his fictional works • a fictitious address • her fictitious companion.

• The two words are largely interchangeable in the sense of 'imaginary', 'invented', or 'not real': •

[of Tom Sharpe's Porterhouse Blue] he reassured dons that the college was fictitious and that no individual tutors had been singled out (Sunday Times).

However, fictional is more frequently used with direct reference to stories, novels, plays, etc.; fictitious is preferred for deliberate justification that is intended to deceive: • Fagin, Scrooge and other fictional characters • this fictitious character you claim to have met in the park.

See also FACTIOUS or FICTITIOUS?

fifth The second f in this word is sometimes not sounded in speech.

• The pronunciations [fɪfθ] and [fɪfθ] are both acceptable, but some people object to the omission of the second f.

figurative Figurative describes language that is metaphorical rather than literal: • That lad's a real doner. • She's a tiger when she gets going. Figurative language can be highly effective in creative writing and as a tool in colloquial speech, but it should be used only sparingly and with care in formal contexts.

See also METAPHORS.

fill in or fill out? In British English, application forms and other official documents are usually filled in rather than filled out: • Fill in this form and give it to the receptionist.

• Fill out is the more frequent verb in American English and is disliked by some British users for this reason alone. It is also considered less appropriate – the blank spaces are to be filled in, like holes, to make the form complete. Fill out suggests enlargement or extension.

The verb fill up is also occasionally used for this purpose.

finalize The verb finalise is best avoided where complete, finish, conclude, settle, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • The preparatory work must be finished [not finalised] as soon as possible.

• The word does, however, serve a useful purpose in some official contexts, combining the senses of 'reach agreement on' and 'put into final form': • The committee met to finalize arrangements for the prime minister's visit.

finished see DONE or FINISHED?

finite verb A finite verb is a verb in any of the forms that change according to the person or number of the subject or accord-
fiord or fjord? Both spellings of this word are acceptable.

- Derived from the Old Norse fjørðr, the word is usually applied to the narrow inlets of the sea along the Scandinavian coastline. Fiord, the Norwegian spelling of the word, is preferred by some users.

fireman or firewoman? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

first or firstly? Firstly may be used in place of the adverb first when enumerating a list:
- There are three good reasons for not buying the house: firstly, it is outside our price range; secondly, it is too close to the railway; thirdly, the garden is too small.

- The use of first . . . secondly . . . thirdly, in accordance with a former convention that rejected the word firstly, remains acceptable and is still favoured by some users. Others, however, find this usage inconsistent, preferring first . . . second . . . third or firstly . . . secondly . . . thirdly, according to the context.

Firstly should not be substituted for first in any of its other adverbial uses:
- When he first [not firstly] came to this country, he could hardly speak any English. - Janet came in first [not firstly], followed by the others.

first name, Christian name, forename, given name or baptismal name? All these expressions are used to denote the name or names borne in addition to one's surname; in British English first name is replacing Christian name as the most frequent choice: *a dictionary of first names.

- The principal objection to Christian name is that it is inapplicable, and possibly offensive, to non-Christians. For this reason the expression is generally avoided on official forms. It remains in regular use, however, in informal contexts: *We never address our teachers by their Christian names.

The term first name may lead to confusion among people who bear more than one such name: *My first name is Leonard but I prefer to be called by my middle name, Mark.

Forename is widely used on official forms but is rarely heard in informal speech. It is not, however, the ideal solution, being inappropriate for people whose surname precedes their other names (Hungarians or the Chinese, for example). The same problem may occur with the use of first name.

Given name is the preferred expression in American English.

The term baptismal name is occasionally used in British English, but like Christian name, it is inapplicable to non-Christians.

fish or fishes? The plural of fish is fishes; fish is used in a wider range of contexts than the alternative form: *Fish live in water and breathe through their gills. *There are five fish in the pond. *Dace, bream, roach, and burbot are all freshwater fishes/fish.

- Considered as a food item, fish usually remains in the singular: *Fish is more expensive than some cuts of meat.

The plural form fishes is most frequently found in technical contexts, often with reference to individual groups or species: *The major division in this group is between jawless and jawed fishes (Longman Illustrated Animal Encyclopedia).

fix or repair? Both these verbs are used in the sense of 'mend', repair being more formal than fix:
- Have you fixed the radio yet? *He was ordered to repair the damaged boat.

- The verb fix has a number of other meanings, principally 'make firm' or 'fasten'.

fjord see FIORD or FIORD?

flaccid The formal adjective flaccid, meaning soft and limp, may be pronounced [flasaid] or [flaivid]. The first pronunciation is more widely accepted than the second.

flagrant see BLATANT or FLAGRANT?

flagship The noun flagship, which denotes the ship that carries the commander of a fleet, is increasingly used in figurative contexts with reference to the most important of a group of products, projects, services, etc.: *Education policy is the Labour party's flagship. *The chain's flagship store is located in a fashionable quarter of San Francisco.

flair or flare? The noun flair means 'a natural aptitude or instinct'; flare is a noun or verb referring to a sudden burst of flame: *a flair for cookery *the flare of the torch.

- The two words are sometimes confused, though not always with the humorous effect of an advertisement from the Gloucestershire Echo quoted by
'Peterborough' in the Daily Telegraph: • Chef/ Cook. Really talented person with flare required at Burlington Court Hotel, experience essential.

Both words have additional senses: flair is an informal synonym for 'stylishness'; a flare is a light signal used especially at sea. To flare may also mean 'to become wider': • a flared skirt.

**flak** The use of flak in the sense of 'heavy adverse criticism or opposition' is best restricted to informal contexts: • Civil-service bureaucrats come in for a lot of flak from the general public.

• The principal meaning of flak is 'antiaircraft fire'; of German origin, the word is an acronym of Flieger (flying) Abwehr (defence) Kanonen (guns).

The spelling flack, an anglicized variant, is also occasionally used.

**flaming** With the advent of electronic communication, the word flaming has acquired a new meaning besides 'being on fire'. To users of electronic mail, it now refers also to the sending or receipt of a mass of insulting e-mail: • Flaming is a phenomenon that can cause its victims considerable distress.

**flammable** see inflammable.

**flare** see flair or flare?

**flaunt or float?** Flaunt means 'show off' or 'display ostentatiously'; float means 'treat with contempt' or 'disregard': • to flaunt one's wealth • to float the rules.

• The use of flaunt in place of float is avoided by careful users in all contexts, but the confusion occurs with some frequency: • If Christians are to campaign against total deregulation [of the laws on Sunday trading] ... they must be seen to obey, and not flaunt, the present law (Jubilee Centre leaflet). This confusion may be due to the sense of openness that is conveyed by both verbs: the open disregard shown by one who flaunts a law may be seen as an open display, or flaunting, of contempt.

**flavour of the month** The phrase flavour of the month is applied to something or someone that is popular or fashionable for a short time: • The new Secretary of State for Education has opposed increases in fees and is likely to be flavour of the month at colleges and universities across the country. The phrase is often used in a derogatory manner. Its overuse should be avoided.

**flee or fly?** The rather literary verb flee means 'run away (from)': • You must flee the town. • They have fled. • I fled from the danger.

The verb fly is also occasionally used in this sense in literary contexts: • You must fly the town, but is more frequently found in its principal sense of (cause to) move through the air': • Most birds can fly. • The children were flying a kite. • We flew to Paris.

• Note the potential ambiguity of the last example, which can mean 'We travelled to Paris by air' or 'We ran away to Paris', although the second meaning is far less likely.

Both verbs are irregular: fled is the past tense and past participle of flee; flew and flown are the past tense and past participle, respectively, of fly.

A fly is also an insect, but the name of the insect that sounds like flee is spelt flea, with a final -a.

**fleshy or fleshly?** Fleshly refers to the body as opposed to the spirit; fleshy refers to the flesh of a person, animal, fruit, or plant: • fleshly desires • fleshly delights • fleshy thigh. Fleshly is occasionally used in place of fleshy, but some users prefer to maintain the distinction between the two adjectives.

**flier or flyer?** The spellings flier and flyer are interchangeable in the sense of 'person or thing that flies' and in such compounds as • high-flier/high-flyer.

**floor or storey?** Both these nouns are used to denote a particular level of a building or the rooms on this level. The word floor is more frequently used with reference to the interior of the building, storey with reference to the exterior or structure. • He lives on the fourth floor. • The new office block will be ten storeys high.

• In American English the first floor of a building is at ground level. In British English this is known as the ground floor, the first floor being the floor above (called the second floor in American English). This difference in usage does not apply to the word storey.

See also storey or story?

**flounder or founder?** To flounder is to struggle, move with difficulty, or act clumsily; to founder is to fail, break down, collapse, or sink. Both verbs can be used literally or figuratively: • They floundered in the mud. • She floundered on to the end of the speech. • The project floundered through lack of support. • The ship floundered at the harbour entrance.
flout

The two verbs are often confused, especially in figurative contexts, flounder being used in place of founder. • [Of the Stokes Mandeville Wheelchair Games] future Games could flounder unless £2.5 million is raised (Bucks Advertiser).

The two words are not unrelated: flounder is probably a blend of founder and blunder. Founder itself is ultimately derived from the Latin fundus 'bottom'.

flout see flound or flout?

flu The word flu – the shortened form of influenza – is more frequent in general and some technical contexts than influenza: • She's off work with (the) flu.

Influenza tends to be restricted to very formal contexts.

See also ABBREVIATIONS; APOSTROPHE.

Flu should not be confused with the noun fume, which denotes a shaft or pipe in a chimney or organ. (Fume was once a variant spelling of flu, but is no longer used for this purpose.)

fluorescent This word, which is usually applied to light fittings, colours, paint, etc., may cause spelling problems.

• Note the order of the vowels in the first syllable (as in fluorine), the -ec combination, and the -ent ending.

flush see blush or flush?

fly see flee or fly?

flyer see flier or flyer?

foib or foist? Both these verbs may refer to the disposal of something unwanted or worthless: • He foibed the damaged toys off on Christmas shoppers. • She always foists the boring jobs off to her assistant.

• The insertion of off after foist: • She always foists the boring jobs off to her assistant, on the model of foib off on, is disliked and avoided by many careful users.

The verb foib off may also be used in the sense of appease or put off: • They foibed us off with the usual excuses. Foist may not be substituted for foib in this sense.

focus The doubling of the final s of the verb focus before a suffix beginning with a vowel is optional. Most dictionaries give focused, focusing, focused, etc., as the preferred spellings, with focused, focusing, focused, etc., as acceptable variants.

• The noun focus has two plural forms, focuses and foci [foi], the latter being largely restricted to technical contexts. The final s of the noun focus is never doubled before the plural ending.

See also SPELLING 1.

The noun focus is often used in the figurative sense of 'centre of attention or activity': • The proposed route for the new bypass is the focus of today's meeting. It is better avoided, however, where emphasis, object, point, etc., would be more appropriate: • the emphasis [not focus] on unemployment in the Labour Party's manifesto.

foetid see fetid or foetid?

foetus or fetus? There are two possible spellings for this word. The first is more frequent in British English, and the second in American English. Fetus is the standard spelling in scientific contexts: • The fetus is no longer viable.

• The distinction between foetus and fetus is in fact spurious, as there is no etymological basis for the -e-spelling, the origin of the word lying in the Latin fetus. Foetus has, nonetheless, been in widespread use since the 18th century.

See also -ae- and -oe.

foist see foib or foist?

folk The use of the noun folk as a synonym for 'people' is generally considered to have slightly old-fashioned and sentimental associations: • country folk • old folk • a name that will be familiar to many folk.

• The word is chiefly used adjectively, in the sense of 'traditional': • folk music • folkdance • folklore.

Like people, the noun folk is used with a plural verb: • Poor folk are often dream of a life of luxury. Folks, the plural form of the word, is largely restricted to informal contexts, in the sense of relatives: • My folks are coming here tomorrow or 'people in general': • That's all, folks!

following The preposition following may be confused with the present participle; it is best avoided where after or because of would be adequate or less ambiguous: • They went home after [not following] the party.

• Following may serve a useful prepositional purpose in the dual sense of 'after and as a result of': • Following the burglary we fitted additional locks to the doors and windows.

Following is also used as an adverbial meaning 'next' or 'about to be mentioned': • I left the following morning. • The following tools will be required . . .

follows, as see AS FOLLOWS.
foment see Ferment or Foment?
foot or feet? The plural of foot, as a unit of measurement, may be foot or feet: • a six-foot fence • five foot tall • nine feet eight inches long • a pane of glass measuring two foot six by four foot three.
• In compound adjectives that precede the noun, the singular form foot is always used: • a three-foot rod. The same convention applies not only to other units of measurement but also to such expressions as a two-car family, four-star petrol, a five-year-old child, etc., and to compound nouns such as trouser leg, toothbrush, etc.
For measurements in feet and inches, feet is preferred in more formal and precise contexts: • seven feet four inches. In informal usage the word inches is omitted and the plural form foot is more frequent: • seven foot four.
In such expressions as three feet high or ten foot wide, the same distinctions of formality and precision may be applied: • The wall must be exactly three feet high. • The room is about ten foot wide.
For larger measurements, such as the height of a mountain, feet is preferred in all contexts.
for see Because, As, For or Since?
for- or fore-? The prefix for- usually indicates prohibition (forbid), abstention (forebear), or neglect (foresee). The prefix fore- means 'before': • foreseeing • forecast • forefather.
• Confusion of these two prefixes may lead to spelling mistakes.
See also Forebear or Forebear; Fargo or Forego?
forbade Forbade, the past tense of the verb forbid, may be pronounced [förbæd] or [förbad].
• The first of these pronunciations, rhyming with mad rather than with made, is the more frequent.
Forbad, an alternative spelling of forbade, is always pronounced [förbad].
forbear or forebear? Forbear is the only accepted spelling of the verb, which means 'to refrain': • I shall forbear from criticizing her appearance. The noun, meaning 'ancestor', may be written forebear or forbear, the spelling forebear being the more frequent: • His forebears were wealthy landowners.
See also For- or Fore?
The two words are not identical in pronunciation: the verb is stressed on the second syllable [förbaɪ]; the noun, which-ever spelling is used, is stressed on the first syllable [förbaɪ].
forbid or prohibit? Both these verbs are used in the sense of 'refuse to allow', prohibit being more authoritative than forbid: • I forbid you to visit her. • The rules prohibit us from visiting her.
• Note the difference in construction: forbid is followed by an infinitive with to; prohibit is followed by an -ing form with from.
See also Forbade.
forceful or forcible? Forceful means 'having great force'; forcible means 'using force': • a forceful personality • forcible expulsion.
• Something that is forceful may be contrasted with something that has little force; something that is forcible may be contrasted with something that uses no force.
In many contexts, in the sense of 'powerful' or 'effective', the two words are virtually interchangeable: • a forceful/forcible reminder. (Some people may interpret a forceful reminder as one that is powerfully presented, a forcible reminder as one that has a powerful effect.)
Forcible should not be replaced by forceful where physical force or violence is involved or implied: • forcible entry.
fore- see For- or Fore?
forebear see Forebear or Forebear?
forefather or foremother? see Non-sexist Terms.
forego see Forgo or Forego?
foregone Foregone, meaning 'already settled' or 'predetermined', is usually encountered in the phrase foregone conclusion:
• Electoral defeat is a foregone conclusion. Many people dislike the recent tendency to use foregone as a noun: • It's a foregone that the party will block such action.
forehead This word is usually pronounced [fɔəridoʊ], rhyming with horrid.
• The variant pronunciations [fɔɾrd] and [fɔrɪd] are widely used and accepted.

FOREIGN WORDS AND PHRASES

The following table, on pages 130–134, lists both familiar and less familiar foreign borrowings with their language of origin in the middle column and their meaning in the right-hand column. Cross references, e.g. see AUFADT, are also included to main entries in the Good Word Guide.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign Words and Phrases</th>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Latin</td>
<td>from the beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ab ovo</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>from the beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a cappella</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>unaccompanied</td>
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<tr>
<td>addendum</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à deux</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>for two people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ad hoc</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>for this purpose (see AD HOC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adieu</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>goodbye</td>
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<tr>
<td>ad infinitum</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>endlessly (see AD INFINITUM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adios</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>goodbye</td>
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<tr>
<td>ad lib</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>spontaneously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ad nauseam</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>interminably (see AD NAUSEAM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ad rem</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>to the point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aficionado</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>enthusiast, expert (see AFICTIONADO)</td>
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<tr>
<td>agent provocateur</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>secret agent</td>
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<tr>
<td>agitprop</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>propaganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>aide-de-camp</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>aide-mémoire</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>reminder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à la carte</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>from a separately priced menu (see À LA CARTE)</td>
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<tr>
<td>à la mode</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>chic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al dente</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>lightly cooked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alfresco</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>out-of-doors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alma mater</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>a person’s school or college (see ALMA MATER)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alter ego</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>other self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alumnus/alumna</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>former male/female pupil (see ALUMNUS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amanuensis</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>secretarial assistant (see MANUENSIS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amour propre</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ancien régime</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>the old system</td>
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<tr>
<td>angoisse</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>anxiety</td>
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<tr>
<td>apparaître</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>underlying</td>
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<tr>
<td>a priori</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>deductive (see A PRIORI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apropos</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>with regard to, appropriate, incidentally (see APREPOS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au contraire</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>on the contrary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au fait</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>well-informed (see AU FAIT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au naturel</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>with nothing added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au pair</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>live-in domestic helper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au revoir</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>goodbye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>badinage</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>humorous banter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beau monde</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>fashionable society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bête noire</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>detested or feared thing or person (see BÊTE NOIRE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bijou</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>compact but elegant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bonne fides</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>good faith (see BONA FIDES)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bon appetit</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>enjoy your meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bonhomie</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>generosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bon mot</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>witticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bon viveur</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>person who enjoys good living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bon voyage</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>farewell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bouquet garni</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>mixture of herbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>bric-a-brac</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>bits and pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>carpe diem</strong></td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>seize the moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>carte blanche</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>freedom of action (see <strong>CARTE BLANCHE</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>casus belli</strong></td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>cause of conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cause célèbre</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>notorious affair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>caveat emptor</strong></td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>buyer beware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>chargé d'affaires</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>diplomat below ambassador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>chef d'oeuvre</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>masterpiece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>che sara sara</strong></td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>what will be, will be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>chez</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>at the house of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>chutzpah</strong></td>
<td>Yiddish</td>
<td>audacity (see <strong>CHUTZPAH</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ciao</strong></td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>goodbye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>compos mentis</strong></td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>of sound mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>contretemps</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>argument or difficulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cordon sanitaire</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>protective barrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>coup de grâce</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>decisive blow (see <strong>COUP DE GRÂCE</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>coup d'état</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>revolution (see <strong>COUP D'ÉTAT</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>crème de la crème</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>the very best (see <strong>CRÈME DE LA CRÈME</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cum laude</strong></td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>with honours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>curriculum vitae</strong></td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>summary of a person's career (see <strong>CURRICULUM VITAE</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>débacle</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>fiasco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>de facto</strong></td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>in actual fact (see <strong>DE FACTO</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>déjà vu</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>something already seen or experienced (see <strong>DÉJÀ VU</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>de jure</strong></td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>by legal right (see <strong>DE JURE</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>denouement</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>final outcome (see <strong>DÉNOUEMENT</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>de rigueur</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>required by social custom (see <strong>DE RIGUEUR</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>dictat</strong></td>
<td>German</td>
<td>order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>distingué</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>distinguished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>distrait</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>distracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>dolce vita</strong></td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>the soft life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>double entendre</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>phrase with a risqué second meaning (see <strong>DOUBLE ENTENDRE</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>du jour</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>of the day, fashionable (see <strong>DU JOUR</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>éclat</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>success, ostentation</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>émigré</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>emigrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>éminence grise</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>influence behind the scenes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>en bloc</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>all together (see <strong>EN BLOC</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>encore</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>en croûte</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>cooked in pastry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>en famille</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>with one's family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>enfant terrible</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>unorthodox person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>en masse</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>in a body (see <strong>EN MASSE</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ennui</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>boredom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>en passant</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>incidentally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>en route</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>on the way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>en suite</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>connected, adjoining bathroom and bedroom (see <strong>EN SUITE</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>entente cordiale</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>cordial relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>entre nous</strong></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>between ourselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ergo</strong></td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>therefore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>esprit de corps</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>team spirit (see ESPRIT DE CORPS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>et al.</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>and other people (see ET AL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ex cathedra</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>with authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ex gratia</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>as a favour, by favour (see EX GRATIA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ex officio</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>by virtue of one’s office (see EX OFFICIO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ex post facto</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>retrospective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extempore</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>unpremeditated (see EXTEMPORANEOUS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>factotum</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>general employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fait accompli</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>done deed (see FAIT ACCOMPLI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faux</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>artificial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faux pas</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>social blunder (see FAUX PAS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>femme fatale</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>seductress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fin de siècle</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>end-of-the-century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flambé</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>in flamed liquor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garni</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>served with a garnish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gauche</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>awkward, clumsy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genre</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>style (see GENRE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gougue</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>strip of meat or fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gravitas</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>seriousness (see GRAVITAS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habeas corpus</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>writ to summon a person before court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hasta la vista</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>until we meet again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>haute couture</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>high fashion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>haute cuisine</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>high-quality cuisine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ho, pollo</td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>common masses (see HORI POLLO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hors de combat</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>out of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hors d’oeuvre</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>appetizer (see HORS D’OEUVRE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elem</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>something already mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imbroglio</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>confusion, muddle (see IMBROGLIO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in absentia</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>in the absence of a person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in camera</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>in private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incognito</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>under a false identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incomunicado</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>out of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in extremis</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>in extreme difficulty (see IN EXTREMIS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in flagrant delicto</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>caught in the act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ingenue</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>naive young woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in loco</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>in place of (see IN LOCUM REIPUS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in memoriam</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>in memory of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in situ</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>in its existing position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in toto</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>completely (see IN TOTO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in transit</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>on the way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in utero</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>in the womb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in vitro</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>in a test tube (see IN VITRO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ipso facto</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>by the fact itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je ne sais quoi</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>indefinable quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jihad</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>holy war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pie de vivre</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>enthusiasm for living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kamikaze</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>suicide, suicidal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kaputt</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>dead, defeated, broken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laissez-faire</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>unrestricted (see Laissez-faire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>largeur</td>
<td>French generosity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leitmotiv</td>
<td>German basic theme</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>lèse-majesté</td>
<td>French disrespect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lingua franca</td>
<td>Italian common language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>locum tenens</td>
<td>Latin temporary substitute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>macho</td>
<td>Spanish ostentatiously masculine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maestro</td>
<td>Italian master, conductor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>magnum opus</td>
<td>Latin masterpiece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maître d'hôtel</td>
<td>French headwaiter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malaise</td>
<td>French unease, debility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mañana</td>
<td>Spanish tomorrow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mangué</td>
<td>French unsuccessful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mettu culpa</td>
<td>Latin I am to blame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mélange</td>
<td>French mixture</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ménage</td>
<td>French household</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ménage à trois</td>
<td>French household of three people</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>modus operandi</td>
<td>Latin method or procedure</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>modus vivendi</td>
<td>Latin compromise</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>mot juste</td>
<td>French appropriate word</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mutatis mutandis</td>
<td>Latin with necessary changes made</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>née</td>
<td>French born</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nil desperandum</td>
<td>Latin never despair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noblesse oblige</td>
<td>French the obligations of nobility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non me tangere</td>
<td>Latin warning against interference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nom de plume</td>
<td>French pen name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non sequitur</td>
<td>Latin statement that does not follow logically from what preceded it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nouveau riche</td>
<td>French newly rich person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nouvelle cuisine</td>
<td>French healthy style of cookery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objet d'art</td>
<td>French work of art</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>œuvre</td>
<td>French literary or artistic work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opus</td>
<td>Latin work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autre</td>
<td>French unconventional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>panché</td>
<td>French flamboyance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>paparazzi</td>
<td>Italian press photographers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>par excellence</td>
<td>French beyond compare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pavé</td>
<td>French upstart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pas de deux</td>
<td>French dance for two</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passé</td>
<td>French outmoded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pastiche</td>
<td>French imitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patois</td>
<td>French non-standard dialect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peccadillo</td>
<td>Spanish minor vice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>penchant</td>
<td>French inclination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>per annum</td>
<td>Latin annually</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>per capita</td>
<td>Latin per head</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>per pro</td>
<td>Latin used when signing a letter on behalf of someone else</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>per se</td>
<td>Latin in itself, as such</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persona non grata</td>
<td>Latin banned or excluded person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Word</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>petit bourgeois</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>lower middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pièce de résistance</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>chief attraction (see PIECE DE RESISTANCE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pied-à-terre</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>temporary lodging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plus ça change</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>the more things change, the more they are the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post hoc</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>henceforth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>précis</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prima facie</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>at first view (see PRIMA FACIE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pro bono publico</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>for the public good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pro forma</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>invoice sent in advance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pro rata</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>proportionately (see PRO RATA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protégé(e)</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>pupil (see PRODIGY or PROTEGE?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quid pro quo</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>exchange (see QUID PRO QUO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quod erat</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>which was to be proved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>raison d'être</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>motivation (see RAISON D'ÊTRE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>re</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>concerning (see RE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recherché</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>choice, obscure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>résumé</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>risqué</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>indelicate, improper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roué</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>rake, debauchee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sangroid</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>composure, equanimity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>savoir faire</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>assurance, capability (see SAVOIR FAIRE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sic</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>thus (see SIC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sic passim</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>so throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sine qua non</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>something essential (see SINE QUA NON)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smorgabord</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>buffet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sotto voce</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>under the breath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spiel</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>chatter, sales pitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>status quo</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>the existing state of affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sub judice</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>before the court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sub rosa</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>in confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sui generis</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>in a class of its own (see SUI GENERIS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>table d'hôte</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>fixed price meal (see TABLE D'HÔTE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tempus fugit</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>time flies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>terra firma</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>firm ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tête-à-tête</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>private conversation (see TÊTE-À-TÊTE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>timbre</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>resonance, tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tour de force</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>feat of skill or ingenuity (see TOUR DE FORCE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trompe l'œil</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>optical illusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ultra vires</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>outside one's power or scope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verbatim</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>word for word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vis-à-vis</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>in relation to (see VIS-À-VIS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viva voce</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>orally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volte-face</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>about-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weltanschauung</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>world view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wettbewerben</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>sentimental pessimism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wunderbar</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>wonderful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wunderkind</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>successful young person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zeitgeist</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>spirit of the time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
foreman or forewoman? See non-sexist terms.

forename see first name, Christian name, forename, given name or baptismal name?

forever or for ever? The adverb forever may be written as a single word in all contexts, but some people prefer to use the two-word form for ever for the principal sense of 'eternally': • We shall remember her for ever. • It will stay there for ever. • Liverpool for ever!

in the sense of 'continually' or 'incessantly', forever is preferred to for ever: • He is forever changing his mind.

The use of forever to mean 'a very long time' is best restricted to informal contexts: • It will take forever to get this carpet clean.

foreword or preface? Both these nouns are used to denote the statement or remarks that often precede or replace the introduction to a book.

• Preface is the older of the two words and the more frequent: some authorities suggest that a foreword is usually written by a person other than the author of the book: • The foreword will be written by a distinguished historian. • Have you read the author's preface?

See also forward or forwards?; prefix or preface?

forge or forego? Forge is the usual spelling of the verb that means 'do without' or 'give up', forego being an accepted variant spelling of this verb: • The union will not forge the right to strike.

• The verb forego, meaning 'go before' or 'precede', is most frequently found in the adjectival forms forgoing or foregone, which have no alternative spellings: • the foregoing instructions • a foregone conclusion.

See also for-; fore-.; forgone.

formally or formerly? These two adverbs are sometimes confused, being identical in pronunciation. Formally means 'in a formal manner'; formerly means 'in the past': • formally dressed • Sri Lanka, formerly called Ceylon.

former and latter Of two previously mentioned items or people, the former denotes the first and the latter the second: • On Monday evening there will be a lecture on local history and a meeting of the chess club: the former will be held in the main hall, the latter in the lounge.

• The former or the latter should not be used to refer to a single previously mentioned item; the item may be repeated or a simple pronoun, such as it or this, may be used: • The killer left the scene of the crime in a stolen car; the car this [not the latter] was later found abandoned in a lay-by.

Of three or more items or people, the first-mentioned should be referred to as the first, the first-named, or the first-mentioned (not the former) and the last-mentioned should be referred to as the last, the last-named, etc. (not the latter): • The secretary, the treasurer, and the chairman had a meeting at the house of the first-named [not the former] yesterday evening.

For the sake of simplicity or clarity, the former, the latter, the first-named, the last-mentioned, etc. should be avoided if possible by restructuring the sentence or by repeating the names of the items or people concerned.

formally see formally or formerly?

formidable This word may be stressed on the first syllable [fòrmídəbəl] or the second syllable [fòrmidəbəl].

• The first of these pronunciations is the more widely accepted in British English.

See also stress.

formulae or formulas? The noun formula has two accepted plural forms, formulae and formulas.

• Formulae, pronounced to rhyme with tree, is largely restricted to scientific contexts: • chemical formulae.

For other senses of formula, the plural form formulas is preferred by most users: • no easy peace formulas that will resolve the dispute • There are many different formulas for success.

forte The noun forte, denoting a person's strong point, may be pronounced as two syllables [fòrti] or as a single syllable [fòrt].

• The first of these pronunciations is the more frequent of the two, although the second is closer to the French original (forte is an English feminine rendering of French fort, meaning 'strong; strength').

The two-syllable pronunciation may possibly have been influenced by the musical term forte, meaning 'loud' or 'loudly'. Pronounced [fòrti] or [fòrt], this word is of Italian origin.

forth or fourth? Forth means 'forward' or 'out into view': • She never spoke again from that day forth. • He brought forth a knife. It should not be confused with fourth, which
fortuitous refers to the number four: • This was the fourth time he had taken the test.

fortuitous or fortunate? Fortuitous means 'happening by chance' or 'accidental'; fortunate means 'having or happening by good fortune' or 'lucky': • a fortuitous meeting • a fortunate child.
• A fortuitous occurrence is not necessarily good, but the similarity between the two words, and their frequent conflation, has led to the increasing acceptance of 'fortunate' as a secondary meaning of fortuitous. Many people object to this usage, which can result in ambiguity: • a fortuitous discovery may be accidental, or lucky, or both. Unlike fortunate, the adjective fortuitous is not applied to people: • You were fortunate to find another job so quickly.

forty Note the spelling of forty, with the -u- of four and fourteen omitted.
• Similarly, forteth has no -e-.

forward or forwards? As an adjective, forward is never written with a final s: • forward motion • a forward remark • forward planning. In some of its adverbial senses, the word may be written forward or forwards: • He ran forward/forwards to greet his father.
• Some users restrict the adverb forwards to physical movement in the opposite direction to backwards; some use forwards in the wider adverbial sense of 'ahead in space or time': others use forward for all adverbial senses of the word.

In idiomatic phrases, such as come forward, put forward, look forward to, etc., and in the sense of 'into a prominent position', the adverb forward is never written with a final s: • She came forward as a witness. • I put forward the proposals at the meeting.

The word forward is also used as a noun (denoting a player or position in various sports) and as a verb: • to forward a letter.

See also -ward or -wards?

Forward, pronounced [fərˈwɔrd], should not be confused with forward, pronounced [fɔːrˈwɔːrd], the introduction to a book.

See also FOREWORD or PREFACE?

foul or fowl? As a noun, foul means 'illegal act': • The player was sent off for a vicious foul. It should not be confused with fowl, denoting a chicken or similar bird: • He ate neither fish nor fowl for several weeks.
• Both words are pronounced [fɔːl].

founder see FOUNDER or FOUNDER

fourth see FORTH or FOURTH

fowl see FOUl or FOWL

foyer In British English this word, meaning 'an entrance hall or lobby in a theatre, hotel, etc.', is usually pronounced [ˈfɔɪər].
• The pronunciations [foyer] and [fɔɪər] are also acceptable, the last of these being an approximation of the French original.

fraction Some people dislike the use of a fraction to mean 'a small part' or 'a little': • We flew there in a fraction of the time it takes to go by sea. • Could you turn the volume down a fraction, please?
• A fraction is not necessarily a small part of the whole; nine-tenths is a fraction.

To avoid possible ambiguity or misunderstanding, a small fraction should be clearly expressed as such: • Why dine out when you can eat at home for a small fraction of the cost? • Only a small fraction of the work has been completed.

See also HYphen 6.

fraught Fraught with means 'filled with' or 'charged with': • fraught with problems • The expedition was fraught with danger. The use of the adjective fraught alone, in the sense of 'tense' or 'anxious', is disliked by some people and is best restricted to informal usage: • a fraught evening • He looked fraught.

-free The adjective free is frequently used in combination to indicate the absence of something undesirable or unpleasant: • lead-free petrol • rent-free accommodation • additive-free food • pollution-free water • duty-free spirits • a trouble-free life.
• Some careful users object to this usage, preferring to replace some compounds by a paraphrase: • accommodation, for which no rent is paid • water that has not been polluted.

free gift Some users avoid the phrase free gift, arguing that it is a tautology, all gifts being necessarily free. Others accept that the phrase has acquired a specific meaning, denoting something given away for promotional purposes.

freeze or frieze? The verb freeze means 'change from liquid into solid form': • Water freezes at 0°C. The noun frieze denotes a decorative or ornamental band or strip on a wall: • a frieze depicting the history
of the town. The two spellings should not be confused.
- Freeze is also used figuratively: • to freeze prices • a pay freeze.

friable The adjective friable, a technical term, means 'crumbly' or 'easily broken up': • friable soil. It has no etymological connection with the verb fry.

-friendly Some people object to the vogue for attaching the adjective friendly to an increasing number of nouns, on the model of USER-FRIENDLY: • customer-friendly • Readers... voted M & S Britain's least parent-friendly high street store (Daily Telegraph).
- In the last three examples, -friendly has developed the extended sense of 'not harmful': • Supermarkets... realised that green products, from ozone-friendly aerosols to bleach-free nappies, can give a marketing edge (Daily Telegraph).

Environmental-friendly has further evolved into the phrase environmentally-friendly, sometimes hyphenated: • No one knows the real costs of this new environmentally-friendly policy.
- The opposite of friendly is -hostile or -unfriendly: • user-hostile • ozone-unfriendly.

See also ENVIRONMENT: GREEN.

frieze see FREEZE or FRIEZE?

frolic The verb frolic adds a k before suffixes beginning with a vowel: • frolicked • frolicking • frolicky. There is no k in the derived adjective frolicsome.

See also SPELLING 1.

front-line In military contexts, the front line is the most advanced or exposed position in a battle. Some people dislike the use of the phrase in figurative or nonmilitary contexts: • a front-line defender of government policy • a front-line inner city areas.

fuchsia Note the spelling of this plant name, particularly the silent ch. It is pronounced [fə'ʃuːsə].
- The plant name honours the German botanist Leonard Fuchs (1501–60).

-ful For nouns ending in -ful, such as cupful, spoonful, sackful, handful, mouthful, etc., most users prefer the plural form -fuls: • two cupfuls • three spoonfuls.
- The plural form -fuls, as in • three cupfuls • two spoonfuls, is regarded by some authorities as rare or old-fashioned and by others as incorrect; it is best avoided.
- It is important to recognize the difference between -ful and full: • a bucketful of water denotes the quantity of water held by a bucket, but not the bucket itself; a bucket full of water denotes both the bucket and the water it contains.

The tendency to confuse -ful with full sometimes leads to the misspelling of both nouns and adjectives, such as spoonful, doubtful, etc., with the ending -ful (see also FULLNESS or FULLNESS?).

fulfil Note the spelling of this word: in British English neither l is doubled.
- The spelling of the derived noun in British English is fulfilment.

The spellings fulfil and fulfillment are almost exclusively restricted to American English. However, the final l of the verb is doubled in British English before a suffix beginning with a vowel, as in fulfilled and fulfilling (see also SPELLING 1).

full see -ful.

fullness or fullness? Both spellings are acceptable, fullness being the more frequent in British English.
- In the nouns derived from adjectives ending in -ful, the l is never doubled: • faithfulness • hopefulness.

full stop The principal use of the full stop as a punctuation mark is to end a sentence that is neither a direct question nor an exclamation.

See also EXCLAMATION MARK: QUESTION MARK: SENTENCES.

In creative writing, reference books, etc., the full stop may also mark the end of a group of words that does not conform to the conventional description of a sentence: • He had drunk six pints of beer and two whiskies. Two very large whiskies.

A full stop is often used in decimal fractions, times, and dates: • 3.6 metres of silk • at 9.15 tomorrow morning • your letter of 26.6.02. Full stops are also used in some ABBREVIATIONS.

A full stop is sometimes called a stop, a point, or in American English a period. In email addresses it is pronounced as dot.

See also BRACKETS: QUOTATION MARKS: SEMICOLONS.

fulsome Fulsome praise, fulsome compliments, etc., are offensively excessive, exaggerated, or insincere.
fun

- Derived from full and the suffix -some, the word originally meant 'abundant'; its derogatory connotations may have developed from a mistaken etymology that associated false with foul.

**fun** The use of the word *fun* as an adjective, meaning 'enjoyable' or 'amusing', is disliked by some users and is best restricted to informal contexts: • a fun game • a fun person. The commercial use of *fun-size* to mean 'small'; • a fun-size packet of sweets • fun-size apples, is also to be avoided.

**function** The verb *function* is best avoided where *work*, *perform*, *operate*, *serve*, *act*, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate, particularly in general, non-technical contexts: • The machine never works [not functions] properly in very hot weather. • The automatic lock serves [not functions] as a safety device.

- Some people also object to the excessive use of the noun *function* as a synonym for 'duty', 'role', 'party', etc.: • What are the precise functions of bishops and priests in the modern world?

**function word** A function word is a word that has no real meaning of its own but serves chiefly to create a grammatical relationship between other words. They can be subdivided into conjunctions, such as and and but; determiners, such as a and the; prepositions, such as at and with; adverbs, such as around and how; modal verbs, such as can and will; primary verbs, such as be and do; and pronouns, such as I and this.

**functional shift** The term *functional shift* describes the process by which a word may shift in grammatical identity from its original function and be used in a new way. Examples include gift, which was originally a noun but has subsequently been also used as a verb, and rubbish, which began as a noun but came to be used also as an adjective: • a rubbish salary and as a verb: • The teacher rubbish his essay.

- Care should be taken in using words that have undergone such shifts in function, as they are often disliked by other users.

**fundamental** The adjective *fundamental* means 'basic', 'essential', 'primary', or 'principal'; it is best avoided where *important*, *major*, *great*, etc., would be more appropriate: • the fundamental difference between the two systems • a major [not fundamental] improvement in East-West relations.

- The noun *fundamental*, which is more frequently used in the plural form, denotes a basic principle, constituent, etc.: • the fundamentals of the issue.

**funeral** or **funereal**? The adjective *funereal* means 'like a funeral; suggestive of death; mournful; gloomy': • funereal music • The atmosphere was funereal. It should not be confused with the noun *funeral* used adjectively: • a funeral service • a funeral cortege.

**fungi** *Fungi*, one of the plural forms of *fungus*, may be pronounced to rhyme with *try* or *tree*; the *g* may be hard, as in *gum*, or soft, as in germ.

- The pronunciations [/fʌŋɡi] and [/fʌn], rhyming with *try*, are the most frequent. The first of these is closer to the singular form, which has a hard *g* sound.

See also **spelling**.

*Funguses* is an alternative plural of *fungus*.

**furore** The final *e* of the noun *furore*, meaning 'uproar' or 'craze', can cause problems of spelling and pronunciation.

- In British English the *e* is never omitted in spelling: *furore* is the usual American spelling of the word.

Furore is usually pronounced as a three-syllable word stressed on the second syllable [ˈfuːrər]. It is occasionally pronounced as a two-syllable word stressed on the first syllable [ˈfʊrər]; this is also the pronunciation of the American spelling.

**further, furthest** see **further, farthest**, **further or furthest**
G

Gaelic or Gallic? Gaelic is a noun or adjective that refers to the Celtic languages of Scotland and Ireland: • to speak Gaelic • a Gaelic word. Gallic is an adjective, meaning 'of France or the French': • a Gallic custom.

The pronunciation of Gaelic is [gælik], with the alternative pronunciation [galik] used especially in regions where the language is spoken. This second pronunciation is identical to that of Gallic, and so may cause confusion or ambiguity in some contexts.

gaiety Gaiety, meaning 'a cheerful and carefree manner' or 'festivity', is sometimes misspelt.

See also GAY.

gait or gate? Gait means 'way of walking or moving': • He walked along the deck with a rolling gait. It should not be confused with gate, meaning 'movable barrier' or 'point of access': • There was a queue of people at the gate.

gallant The adjective gallant, 'brave and courageous', as in: • put up a gallant fight, is stressed on the first syllable [gælənt].

The sense 'courteous to women' may have the same pronunciation or may, in rather old-fashioned English, be stressed on the second syllable [gælənt].

Gallic see GAEIC or GALLIC?

gallop Note the spelling of this verb, particularly the -l- and the final p, which is not doubled before -ed, -ing, etc.: • The horse galloped across the field. • galloping inflation.

gamble or gambol? The verb gamble means 'take a risk on a game of chance'; gambol means 'skip and jump playfully'.

The spelling of these words is sometimes confused although their meanings are very different. • He went to the casino to gamble. • lambs gambolling in the fields.

gael see JAIL or GAOL?

garage This word may be pronounced [garæzh] or [garij]. Many users prefer the former pronunciation.

• The stress falls on the first syllable in British English, although in American English [garæzh], the second syllable is stressed.

gases or gasses? The plural of the noun gar is gars or, less commonly, gasses.

• Gasses is also a form of the verb gas, meaning 'affect with a gas' or 'talk idly'.

See also SPELLING 1.

-gate The suffix -gate, derived from the Watergate affair (a scandal involving Richard Nixon, then president of the USA, in 1972), is sometimes attached to other words to denote a political scandal: • Iran-gate/Con-tragate (an American scandal in 1987 involving the sale of arms to Iran and use of the profits to supply arms to the anti-Communist Contras in Nicaragua). • The Dianagate scandal, the disclosure of intimate tapes of conversations believed to be between the princess and James Gilby, her close friend (Sunday Times).

• Many of these coinages are inevitably journalistic and ephemeral in usage and are best avoided in formal contexts.

gate see GAIT or GATE?

gauge This word, which means 'measure or standard', is frequently misspelt. The u comes after the a and not before it.

• The correct pronunciation is [gæj]. A mispronunciation [gæw] may arise from the unusual spelling.

gay The adjective gay is so widely used as a synonym for 'homosexual' that its use in the original sense of 'cheerful', 'merry', or 'bright' may be open to misinterpretation in some contexts: • a gay bachelor • a gay party.

• The noun gay is principally applied to homosexual men, lesbian being the preferred term for
homosexual women: a community centre for gays and lesbians. The noun derived from gay in the sense 'homosexual' is gayness; in other senses it is gaily.

In the sense of 'homosexual', gay is becoming increasingly acceptable in formal contexts and for many gay people is preferable to homosexual itself.

greek The word greek describes someone who is obsessively interested in something, especially in something that most people find only moderately interesting: His brother's a computer geek. The term often carries derogatory overtones, suggesting the person is unattractively or boringly obsessive: She liked the look of him but he turned out to be a real geek.

* The word has the derived adjective geeky: her geeky little brother.

gender The word gender refers to the grammatical classification of nouns as masculine, feminine, or neuter. The use of gender as a synonym for 'sex' is avoided by many users in formal contexts: Applications are invited from suitably qualified candidates of either sex [not gender]. In some compounds in informal use, gender is used instead of sex, e.g. gender-bending: the blurring of the difference between the sexes, for example by transvestism.

* The frequency of this usage is attributable both to the use of the word sex as a synonym for 'sexual intercourse' and to the association in English grammar between gender and sex.

In many languages all nouns are of masculine or feminine gender; the French word for flower is feminine; the Italian word for carpet is masculine. In English, however, masculine nouns refer to male people, animals, etc., and feminine nouns to female people, animals, etc.: king, brother, drake, and bull are masculine nouns; heroine, queen, mother, omen, and cow are feminine nouns.

See also ANIMALS, NON-SEXIST TERMS, SEXISM.

general or generic? The adjective general has a wide range of meanings, including 'widespread', 'overall', and 'not specialized or specific': general opinion general knowledge. Generic means 'referring to a whole class or group': a generic term for products that do not damage the environment.

* Generic is also used in the sense 'cheaper, because it does not have a trade name': a generic drug.

genes or jeans? In science, genes are the units of heredity that transfer certain characteristics from one generation to another: The scientists have mapped the entire gene sequence. The word should not be confused with jeans, which describe working or casual trousers made of durable twill cloth: She pulled her jeans on.

genetic, genial see CONGENIAL, GENIAL, CONGENITAL or GENETIC.

genre The word genre, meaning 'category' or 'style', may be pronounced in different ways. The anglicization of the French pronunciation is [zhɔ̃tʁ], but [jo̞nʁ] is also widely heard. A third pronunciation, [shahrnʁ], is occasionally used but this is sometimes considered pretentious.

gentleman Gentleman is used as a synonym for 'man' in some formal or official contexts and as a term of politeness: Show the gentleman to his room. Ladies and gentlemen, may I introduce tonight’s guest speaker?

* The noun gentleman has connotations of nobility, chivalry, and good manners: a county gentleman. If you were a gentleman you’d stand up and give me your seat.

See also MAN, WOMAN.

geriatric Many people object to the increasing use of the noun and adjective geriatric as derogatory synonyms for 'old person' or 'elderly': These geriatric drivers should be banned from the roads. The country is governed by a bunch of geriatrics.

* Geriatrics is the branch of medical science concerned with the diseases of old age and the care of old people; the use of geriatric in such contexts as the geriatric ward of the hospital is acceptable to all users.

gerunds see INFINITIVE, -ING FORMS.

get In formal contexts get can often be replaced with an appropriate synonym, such as become, buy, obtain, receive, etc.: It is becoming [not getting] increasingly difficult to obtain [not get] impartial advice on financial matters. However, if the synonym sounds clumsy or unnatural in context, or causes ambiguity, get should be retained or the sentence restructured.

* The same principles apply to phrasal verbs, idioms, and other expressions containing get, such as get out (escape), get by (survive), get dressed
(dress), get well/recover;  • often get up/rose at six.
  • They will get married/marry in the spring.
  See also got.

geyer  The noun geyer, meaning 'hot spring' or 'water heater', is usually pronounced [gëzər] in British English and [gëzər] in American English.

gibe, jibe or gybe  The word gibe, or variant spelling jibe, means 'jeer or taunt':
  • gibe/jibe and insults.
  • Gybe, sometimes spelt gibe or jibe, is a nautical term referring to the movement of a ship's sail.

gild or guild  Gild is a verb, meaning 'cover with gold' (see also gilt or guild?) or 'make golden in colour':
  • gilded picture frames  • The setting sun gilded the leaves.
  Guild is a noun, denoting an organization of craftsmen, tradespeople, or other people with similar or related interests:
  • a guild of wine merchants  • She belongs to the Townspeople's Guild.
  • Gild is also a rare variant spelling of the noun guild.

gilt or guilt  Gilt is a variant form of the past participle of the verb gilt (see gild or guild?) used as an attributive adjective in the sense of 'covered with gold':
  • a gilt candlestick.
  As a noun, gilt denotes the gold or other substance used for this covering:
  • Some of the gilt had worn away. It should not be confused with the noun guilt, meaning 'responsibility for wrongdoing':
  • a feeling of guilt  • He admitted his guilt.

gipsy or gypsy  This word, meaning 'wanderer', has two spellings: gipsy and gypsy.
  • Some users prefer the s spelling, but the y spelling indicates the derivation from Egyptian.
  At one time this migrant people was thought to have originated from Egypt.
  See also Roma.

girl see woman.

given name see first name, christian name, forename, given name or baptismal name?

glacier  The first syllable of this word, which means 'a vast area of ice', may be pronounced to rhyme with moss [glasər] or with clay [glaysər].
  • Both pronunciations are acceptable in British English, while [glasər] is the usual American English pronunciation.

glamorous  Some people object to the frequent use of the adjective glamorous as a synonym for 'beautiful', 'romantic', 'exciting', 'interesting', etc.:
  • a glamorous setting  • a glamorous career.
  • The adjective is best restricted to the combination of showy attractiveness, fashion, romance, excitement, charm, and fascination that is known as glamour:
  • a glamorous film star  • a glamorous lifestyle.
  • The u of glamour is usually omitted in the adjective glamorous, although some dictionaries acknowledge the rare variant spelling glamorous.

glass ceiling  A glass ceiling is an invisible barrier to promotion, based on sex or race. Increasingly, the expression is being applied to barriers that prevent women from rising to top-level executive positions:
  • Does your organisation have a glass ceiling?
  • A motion calling for the removal of the glass ceiling on women becoming bishops is back on the synod's agenda (The Guardian).
  • A glass ceiling was originally conceived of as a hypothetical barrier which allowed people to see a goal while at the same time prevented them from reaching it.

global  The adjective global is increasingly used with specific reference to geopolitical or environmental issues that affect the whole world:
  • global consciousness  • global politics  • Terrorism is a global issue.
  • Think of the world as a global village. This usage is probably influenced by the phrase global warming (see greenhouse effect).
  • The use of global in such contexts may cause confusion with the more general sense of worldwide.
  • Globalization is often used negatively to refer to the process by which large international companies can dominate markets and even economies worldwide:
  • protests resulting from the globalization of modern communications.

glycerin or glycerine  Both spellings glycerin and glycerine are correct. Glycerin is the usual spelling in American English, while glycerine is the customary spelling in British English.

gobbledygook  The noun gobbledygook is used in informal contexts to denote the pretentious or incomprehensible jargon of bureaucrats, especially the circumlocutory language of official documents, reports, etc.
gobsmacked

- The alternative spelling gobbledygook is in regular use.
  See also OFFICIALEESE.

**gobsmacked** The adjective gobsmacked, meaning 'astounded; flabbergasted; speechless with amazement', is a slang term that should not be used in formal contexts: • I was gobsmacked when I found out how much it would cost. • There was a long pause (maybe he was gobsmacked at the prospect of me staying at home for another year), then an unconvincing 'Never mind' (The Guardian).

**god or God?** A god is any of a number of beings worshipped for their supernatural powers. God, written with a capital G, is the supreme being worshipped in many religions as the creator and ruler of all: • the god of war • the Greek god • to believe in God • for God's sake.
- Compounds and derivatives of the noun, whether they refer to a god or to God, are usually written with a lower-case g: • godly • godless • godchild • godsend. The adjectives god-fearing and god-forsaken, however, may be written with a capital or lower-case g: God-forsaken is usually hyphenated.

**gold or golden?** The word gold is used adjectively to describe things that are made of gold or contain gold: • a gold medal • a gold mine. The adjective golden usually refers to the colour of gold: • golden hair • golden syrup.
- In the four examples above gold and golden are not interchangeable; however, gold is sometimes used in the sense of 'gold-coloured' and golden in the sense of 'made of gold': fabric with blue and gold stripes • a golden necklace.
- Golden has a number of other meanings, such as 'prosperous': • golden age, 'important': • golden rule, and 'fiftieth': • golden anniversary.
- The phrase golden handshake, denoting a large sum of money paid to a retiring employee, has given rise to golden hello (a similar sum paid to a new employee), golden handcuffs (a payment made to discourage an employee from leaving), and golden parachute (a guarantee of compensation if the employee is dismissed or deated following a takeover). A golden share is the control held by a national government in a privatized company in order to prevent the company from being taken over by foreign business interests.

**good or well?** Good and well are sometimes confused. Good is used as an adjective after such linking verbs as be and seem or where a sensory function is involved, while well is chiefly used as an adverb after verbs without any sensory function: • the food smelt good and had been chosen well. Note the difference between feel good and feel well (in which well is used as an adjective): • I don't feel too good is an informal way of saying • I don't feel very well (i.e. I feel ill), but in less informal contexts feel good has connotations of moral, emotional, or spiritual well-being that feel well does not have.
- See also FEEL-GOOD FACTOR.

**goodwill or good will?** The term meaning 'a feeling of kindness and concern', as in: • a gesture of good will, can be written either as one word or as two.
- Some users prefer the latter, unless the term is being used in the commercial sense when it is written goodwill. • They paid £12,000 for the goodwill of the shop and £6,000 for the stock.

**gorilla** see GUERRILLA, GUERRILLA OR GORILLA?

**gossip** Note the spellings of the derived forms: gossiped, gossiping, gossiper, gossipy. • They gossiped all afternoon • a gossipy letter.
- The word gossip derives from God and sibb 'relation', as in modern sibling. Gossips were originally the equivalent of present-day godparents and over the course of time the word became applied to close friends and then to the sense of people who were fond of engaging in idle talk.

**got** Got, the past participle of get, is often superfluous in the expressions have got (meaning 'possess') and have got to (meaning 'must'); • He has (got) grey hair and a small moustache. • They have (got) to win this match to avoid relegation.
- In informal contexts, especially in negative sentences, questions, and CONTRACTIONS, got is often retained: • We haven't got any milk. • Have you got enough money? • I've got to write to my brother.
- In some contractions, the occasional omission of got may cause confusion: • She's a cat may mean 'she's a cat' or 'she has a cat'; She's got a cat is unambiguous.
- Used alone, got is the past tense of get; it should not be used in place of have or have got: • They have/have got [not They got] three children. • I got a new car last week.
- Gotten is an American variant of the past participle got; in British English its use is restricted to such expressions as ill-gotten gains.
gourmand or gourmet? A gourmand enjoys the pleasurable indulgence of eating, with or without regard to the quality of the food. Gourmet, the more common and also more complimentary of the two terms, refers only to a connoisseur of fine food or drink: • The size of the meals will satisfy the gourmand, their quality should please the most discriminating gourmet. To avoid ambiguity, gourmand may be replaced by glutton in the sense of ‘one who eats greedily or to excess’.

• Many people object to the increasing use of gourmet to describe restaurants, meals, etc., in which the food is elaborate and expensive but not necessarily of high quality. Gourmand is usually pronounced [ɡʊrmənd] or [ɡoʊrmənd]. gourmet is pronounced [ɡʊrˈmɛnt]. Both words are occasionally stressed on the second syllable.

government In the sense of ‘the group of people who govern a country, state, etc.’, government may be a singular or a plural noun: • The government is blamed for the rise in unemployment. • The government have rejected the proposal.

See also COLLECTIVE NOUNS; SINGULAR OR PLURAL?

graceful or gracious? Graceful refers to movement, actions, forms, shapes, etc., that have grace, in the sense of beauty, charm, or elegance: • a graceful dance. Gracious means ‘kind’, ‘courteous’, ‘benevolent’, or ‘compassionate’: • a gracious gift.

• The two words are not interchangeable, although they may occasionally qualify the same noun: • a graceful gesture is a beautiful or elegant movement; a gracious gesture is an act of kindness or courtesy.

The adjective gracious may also occasionally imply condescension: • She thanked the waiter with a gracious smile. In such expressions as gracious living, the word conveys an impression of luxury, comfort, elegance, and indulgence.

graffiti Nowadays very few people still object to the widespread use of graffiti as a singular noun: • Graffiti covers the walls of the community centre. • Some of this graffiti is quite obscene.

• Graffiti, the singular of this Italian borrowing, meaning ‘a little scratch’, is used only very occasionally to refer to a single inscription or drawing: • The first graffiti appeared the day after the room was repainted.

Note the spelling of the word, particularly the -ff- and single -r.

grammar The word grammar, which denotes the rules of a language or a type of school: • Latin grammar • a grammar school, is often misspelt. The most frequent error is the substitution of -er for the -ar ending. Note also the -mm.-

grand- or great-? Both these prefixes are used to denote family relationships that are two or more generations apart. Either prefix may be used for the aunts and uncles of one’s parents and the children of one’s nephews and nieces, great- being more frequent than grand-: • great-niece • grand-nephew • great-uncle • grandaunt.

• The prefix grand- is always used for the parents of one’s parents and the children of one’s children: • granddaughters • grandfather • grandchild • grandma.

The prefix great- is also used for the parents of one’s grandparents and the children of one’s grandchildren: • great-grandmother • great-grandson • great-grandparent. (The father of one’s great-grandfather is one’s great-great-grandfather, and so on.)

glass roots Some people object to the widespread use of this term both in political or industrial contexts and as a noun meaning ‘the fundamental level’ or as an adjective ‘fundamental’ or ‘basic’: • the grass roots of the problem • at the grass-roots level • support for the party at the grass roots • grass-roots opinion.

• The noun glass roots came originally from mining in the USA, referring to the soil immediately below the surface. It was subsequently applied to the ordinary people as opposed to the political leaders of society. The grass roots of a trade union or other organization are its rank-and-file members.

gratuitous The adjective gratuitous is most frequently used in the sense of ‘un warranted’ or ‘uncalled-for’: • gratuitous violence • gratuitous criticism.

• The original meaning of the word is ‘free’ or ‘given without payment’.

gravitas The noun gravitas, meaning ‘serious or solemn nature or manner; weight, substance, or importance’, is a vogue word that is increasing in frequency: • The most mentioned attribute which best equips him [Peter Sissons] for sustained political encoun-
gray

ters is the gravitas he clearly was born with (The Guardian). • [Jonathan Dimbleby] felt to be a safe pair of hands, with sufficient stature to give the book gravitas (Daily Telegraph). Some users consider the word to be a pretentious and unnecessary synonym for 'seriousness'.

• The implication, since this is a Latin word, is the high solemnity of the mythical ancient Roman official.

gray see GREY or GRAY?

graze The verb graze, traditionally applied to animals in the sense of 'eat', is increasingly used in human contexts with three specific meanings: 'eat small amounts of food throughout the day', 'eat food from supermarket shelves while shopping', and 'eat standing up'. The first sense is the most frequent in British English: • doing away with family meals and replacing them, as the report suggests, with grazing...eating (Daily Telegraph).

• The second and third senses are largely restricted to American English but are becoming increasingly common in British English.

great see GRAND- or GREAT-?

Great Britain see BRITAIN.

Greek or Gregian? The adjective Greek means 'of Greece, its people, or its language'; Gregian means 'in the simple but elegant style of classical Greece': • Greek history • a Gregian verse.

• The adjective Gregian was formerly applied to the art, architecture, literature, culture, etc., of ancient Greece; in these senses it has been largely superseded by Greek.

The noun Greek denotes a native or inhabitant of Greece; a Gregian is a scholar of classical Greek language or literature.

green The adjective green is becoming overused in its application to any product, policy, or ideology that is connected with the protection of the environment: • green consumerism • green issues • to go green • The Whole Thing is a mail order company dedicated to providing a wide range of over 150 of the greenest products available (advertisement, The Guardian).

• As a noun, green may be spelt with a lower-case or capital initial letter to denote a person who is generally in support of the protection of the environment, but the lower-case form is probably more frequent in this sense. Spelt with a capital G, the word specifically denotes a political party that is chiefly concerned with the protection of the environment: • to vote Green • The Greens have shaken Britain's three big parties by winning 2.25m votes and 15% of the poll in the European elections (Sunday Times).

A greenfield site is a rural undeveloped site, often near a town or city, that has not been designated as part of a green belt and so is available for development, e.g. for industrial estates, retail parks, or housing.

The verbal noun greening has been coined to denote the process of removing environmentally harmful substances: • the greening of the city streets • the greening of the washing machine (a reference to 'environment-friendly' detergents).

See also BROWNFIELD; ENVIRONMENT; FRIENDLY.

greenhouse effect The greenhouse effect is the warming of the earth's atmosphere (global warming) caused by an accumulation of gases that trap the radiated heat from the sun: • Flood defence along Britain's coasts will fail to prevent large tracts of farmland from being flooded when sea levels rise because of the greenhouse effect (Daily Telegraph). The gases thus function like the glass in a greenhouse, hence the name. Sometimes called greenhouse gases, they include carbon dioxide produced by the burning of coal, oil, stubble, and the tropical rainforests that would normally absorb carbon dioxide from the air.

grey or gray? This word can be spelt with an e or an a, although the former is far more frequent in British English.

• Gray is standard in American English.

grieve The verb grieve is followed by the preposition for or over: • She grieved for [or over] the death of her horse.

grievous The correct pronunciation of this word, most frequently encountered in the phrase grievous bodily harm, is [grievus], not [greevius]. Note the spelling of the word, particularly the order and position of the vowels.

grill or grille? A grill is a framework of bars used for cooking food. A grille is a grating over a window or door.

• These words are occasionally confused, especially as grille can also sometimes be spelt grill.
grisly or grizzly? The spellings of these words may sometimes be confused. Grisly means ‘gruesome’; grisly means ‘partly grey’: • a grisly bear, or ‘whining fretfully’: • a grizzly toddler.

ground zero The phrase ground zero originally described the location immediately above or below the area where a nuclear explosion takes place and, by extension, the starting point or site of activity of some kind, especially of a military nature. Since the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001, however, the phrase has come to be uniquely associated with the site of the former towers and is now normally used only in reference to that event, although it can be used by extension to other similarly devastated sites: • Prayers at Bali’s ground zero (The Guardian).

grow Care should be taken over the metaphorical use of the transitive verb grow, as this is considered unacceptable by many people: • grow a range of products • grow their profits • grow a successful young team of players. The literal use of the transitive verb is, however, generally acceptable: • grow some houseplants.

growth The word growth is used adjectivally, in the sense of ‘rapidly developing or increasing’, in economic and commercial spheres: • a growth industry • a growth economy. • In other contexts it is often better replaced by a paraphrase: • Canoeing is a growth sport could well be changed to: The sport of canoeing is increasing in popularity.

guarantee This word, which is often mis-spelt, means ‘an assurance that a certain agreement will be kept’: • The washing-machine was still under guarantee.

• It is worth remembering that the vowels of the first syllable are like those in guard: • A guarantee guards the rights of the consumer.

guerrilla, guerrilla or gorilla? Guerrilla/guerrilla means ‘fighter within an independent army’: • a guerrilla war; a gorilla is a large ape. The spellings guerrilla and guerrilla are both acceptable, although the latter is preferred by many users since it derives from the Spanish guerra ‘a war’, with -rr-.

• The usual pronunciation of both words is [ɡərˈliə]. However, guerilla/guerrilla may be pronounced [ɡərˈliːə] to make it distinct from gorilla (ɡɔrɪˈliə).

guesstimate The word guesstimate, meaning ‘rough estimate’, resulted from the combination of guess and estimate: • He quoted a figure but warned that it was only a guesstimate. The word is disliked by many people and should be used sparingly and only in informal contexts.

guest The use of the word guest as a verb, in the sense of ‘be a guest (on a television or radio show)’, is disliked by some users and is best restricted to informal contexts: • She guested on his chat show last month.

• Unlike host, the verb guest is not used outside the entertainment industry: • He was a guest at our wedding (not He guested at . . .).

guidelines Some people object to the increasing use of the plural noun guidelines in place of advice, policy, instructions, rules, etc.: • New guidelines to establish minimum sentences in rape cases (The Guardian). • The series is within the BBC’s guidelines on violence (Daily Telegraph).

• The noun guidelines, which is rarely used in the singular, is now usually written as one word: the hyphenated form guide-lines is an accepted but less frequent variant.

guild see GILD or GUILD?
guilt see GILT or GUILT?
gut The use of the word gut as an adjective, meaning ‘instinctive’, ‘strong’, ‘basic’, or ‘essential’, is best restricted to informal contexts: • a gut reaction • a gut feeling • gut issues.

gybe see GIBE, JIBE or GYBE?
gymkhana This word, meaning ‘competition for horses and their riders’, is sometimes mis-spelt.

• It is worth remembering that gym is spelt as in gymnastics and khana as in khaki.

gynaecology This word, meaning ‘the branch of medicine concerned with women’s diseases’, is frequently mis-spelt. Note the y and, in British English ae, or American English e.

• See also -AE and -OE.

• This word is pronounced [ˈɡɪnəkələ].
gypsy see GIPSY or GYPSY?
haemoglobin or hemoglobin? This word, describing the red protein in blood, is sometimes misspelt. *Haemoglobin* is the usual spelling in British English, while *hemoglobin* is the accepted spelling in American English.

haemorrhage This noun, meaning 'immense loss of blood', is often misspelt. Note the -rh- and the British English -oe-, which is reduced to -e- in American English (see -EA- and -OE-).

hail or hale? The noun *hail* means 'frozen rain'; the verb *hail* means 'call' or 'be a native of': • *hail a taxi* • *She hails from Scotland*. *Hail* should not be confused with *hale*, meaning 'vigorous and healthy': • *hale and hearty*.

hair or hare? *Hair* describes the fine strands that grow on the skin of human beings and other animals. It should not be confused with *hare*, which describes a species of animal resembling a large rabbit.

half Although *half* is a singular noun, it is followed by a plural verb when it denotes a number rather than an amount: • *Half of the books are missing*. • *Half of the water has evaporated*. In most cases the word of is optional: • *Give him half (of) the money*. • Such expressions as a half-hour and half an hour, a half-dozen and half a dozen, a mile and a half and one and a half miles, etc., are equally acceptable in most contexts. However, the insertion of an extra indefinite article before half an hour, half a dozen, etc., is avoided by careful users.

See also *hyphen 4*.

half- or step? One's *step-parent* (stepmother or stepfather) is the new spouse of a divorced or widowed parent. Any children of this step-parent by previous partners become one's *stepbrothers or stepsisters*. Any children of one's father or mother by this step-parent (or any other partner) are one's *half-brothers or half-sisters*.

- Confusion arises because half-brothers and half-sisters are usually the offspring of one's stepmother or stepfather. A person may have both half-brothers (or half-sisters) and stepbrothers (or stepsisters).

- Note that half- is always attached with a hyphen in this sense, whereas step- is attached without a hyphen (except in the case of step-parent).

hallo see *hello, hallo* or *hullo*?

handful Most users prefer to form the plural *fuls*: • *handfuls*. See also *ful*.

handicap The final *p* of the word *handicap* is doubled before a suffix beginning with a vowel: • *handicapped* • *handicapping*.

See also *spelling 1*.

- The words *handicap* and *handicapped* are avoided by many people in relation to those suffering from various physical or mental disabilities on the grounds that these terms have negative connotations. Preferred alternatives include *disabled* and *person with disabilities*.

See also *disabled*.

hands-on This expression refers to practical or personal involvement in a task: • *This is not a desk job. It is a 'hands-on' sales role (Daily Telegraph)*. • *The Prime Minister returned to London last night to resume hands-on control of the Gulf crisis (The Guardian)*.

- The term *hands-on* is often used in the expression *hands-on experience*, practical experience 'in . . . learning' – where students can obtain real experience of possible future jobs – or in business, where there is a similar implication of rolling up one's sleeves and getting involved, rather than simply reading or talking, or in a variety of situations where the practical is seen as 'proving on the merely theoretical' (Jonathan Green, *Dictionary of Jargon*).

hangar or hanger? These words are often misspelt. A *hangar* is a building for storing aircraft; a *hanger* is an apparatus on which articles can be hung: • *coat hanger*.
To avoid mistakes, remember the a in aircraft and in hangar.

**hanged** or **hung**

_Hung_ is the past tense and past participle for most senses of the verb _hang_; _hanged_ is restricted to the meaning 'suspended by the neck until dead', in the context of capital punishment or suicide: • He hung his coat on the peg. • The picture was hung up in the hall. • The conspirators were hanged for treason. • Her father hanged himself.

**hanger** see **hangar** or **hanger**?

**hang-up** The noun _hang-up_ is an informal name for a mental or emotional problem or inhibition: • She's got a hang-up about answering the phone. The world should not be used in formal contexts.

**hang-up** is usually hyphenated in British English but may be written as one unhyphenated word in American English. The plural of _hang-up_ is _hang-ups_.

**hanker** The verb _hanker_ is followed by the preposition _after_ or _for_: • those who hanker _after_ (or _for_). _power_.

**happy** The adjective _happy_ is followed by the preposition _about_ or _with_: • Are you happy _about_ (or _with_). _the arrangements_?

**hara-ki** _Hara-ki_ is the traditional spelling of this Japanese term, which refers to a ritual act of suicide by cutting open the abdomen: • to _commit_ hara-ki. It is pronounced [hara-ki].

**hara-ki** The variant spelling _hari-kari_, pronounced [hari kari] or [hari karı], is best avoided.

**harangue** This word, which means 'a vehement and lengthy speech', as in: • a long harangue about the state of the economy, is sometimes misspelt.

**harangue** The -gue ending is the same as in _mingue_.

**harass** This word, meaning 'trouble persistently', is spelt with a single _-s_ and ends in _-s_. It is pronounced [hāras]. The American pronunciation [hārəs] has recently come into British English but is disliked by some people.

**harass** Note that the same spelling rules apply for _harassment_.

**hardly** In the sense of 'only just' or 'almost not' the adverb _hardly_, like its synonyms _scarcely_ and _barely_, is used with negative force; it is unnecessary to add another negative to the clause or sentence: • I _can_ [not can't] hardly see you.

See also **DOUBLE NEGATIVE**.

**careful users avoid using than** in place of when in the constructions hardly...when, scarcely...when, or barely...when. • She had hardly begun to speak when [not than] she interrupted her. • Scarcely had they reached the end of the road when [not than] the rain began. This confusion may be due to the use of than in the construction 

**harem** see **hair** or **hare**?

**hare** see **hair** or **hare**?

**harem** see **CLEFT UP**.

**hated** The noun _hated_ is followed by the preposition for or of: • Her hatred for [or of] her father.

**have** see **OF**.

**have got (to)** see **GOT**.

**hazardous** The adjective _hazardous_ is followed by the preposition to or for: • These sharp edges can be hazardous to [or for] young children.

**he** see **HE** or **SHE**.

**headed for** or **heading for**? The phrase _be headed for_ is sometimes wrongly used in place of _be heading for_. When the verb _head_ is used intransitively, the correct phrase is _be heading for_: • We were _heading_ [not _headed_] for Southampton. • The government is _heading_ _[not headed]_ for defeat.

**headmaster** or **headmistress**? see **NON-SEXIST TERMS**.

**head up** Many people dislike the use of this phrasal verb in place of the simpler _head_, meaning 'lead' or 'be in charge': • to head up a team of workers.

**heal** or **heel**? _Heal_ means 'cure' or 'become sound again'. It should not be confused with _heel_, which refers to the back part of the foot.

**heal** or **heel**? Note also the spelling of well-heeled (meaning 'wealthy'): • She came from a well-heeled background.
healthful

healthful or healthy? Healthy can mean 'having good health' or 'promoting good health': • a healthy child • a healthy diet. Healthful is a less frequent synonym of healthy in both these senses, but in modern usage it is largely restricted to the sense of 'promoting good health': • foods that are both healthful and relatively inexpensive.

hear The verb hear is followed by the preposition of in the sense 'know about': • I'd never heard of the disease before, and by about or of in the sense 'find out about': • I only heard about [or of] his promotion yesterday.

heard or herd? Heard is the past participle of the verb hear. It should not be confused with herd, a noun referring to a large number of cattle or other animals.

hearing impaired Hearing impaired is the preferred modern alternative to deaf, which is considered unacceptable by many people because of its negative connotations.

heaved or hove? Heaved is the usual form of the past tense or past participle of the verb hove: • He heaved the crate up the steps. • She heaved a sigh of relief. Hove is an archaic variant of heaved that is used facetiously or in nautical contexts, in the past tense or past participle of heave to mean 'stop', and hove into sight (or view), meaning 'appear': • We hove to for lunch. • A ship hove into sight.

heinous This word, meaning 'extremely evil': • a heinous crime, is often misspelt and mispronounced. Note the 'i' spelling and the stress on the first syllable [heˈniːs].

• The pronunciation [heˈniːs] is also acceptable but [heˈniː] is best avoided.

hello, hallo or hullo? This word of greeting has various spellings which are all acceptable. The first spelling is probably the most frequent in contemporary usage.

help Many people object to the phrases cannot/can't/could not/couldn't help but, as in: • I couldn't help but laugh, preferring either I couldn't help laughing or, less frequently, I couldn't but laugh.

• The idiomatic cannot/can't/could not/couldn't help construction, where help means 'refrain from', is followed by a present participle.

See also but.

In the sense of 'assist' or 'contribute' help is usually followed by a direct object and/or an infinitive, with or without to: • These pills will help you (to) sleep. • They all helped (to) tidy the house. Some users prefer to retain to in the absence of a direct object: • This money will help to pay for the new car. • This money will help us pay for the new car.

hemi- see demi-, hemi- or semi-

hence Hence means 'from this time' or, more rarely, 'from this place'; it is therefore unnecessary to precede the adverb with from: • The concert will begin three hours hence.

• The use of hence in the sense of 'from this place' is largely restricted to very formal or archaic contexts.

See also THENCE.

Hence is also used to mean 'for this reason' or 'therefore': • My route is more direct, and hence faster, than yours. • Her father drowned at sea, hence her reluctance to go sailing. In the second of these examples, note that hence is often followed by a noun rather than a verb; to replace hence with therefore would involve rewording the clause: • . . . therefore she is reluctant to go sailing.

he or she The use of he/him/his as pronouns of common gender, with reference to a person of unspecified sex, is widely considered to be misleading and sexist, as is the use of she/her/hers for the same purpose with reference to jobs or activities that are traditionally associated with women: • The
candidate must pay his own travelling expenses. • This book will be of great value to the student nurse preparing for her examinations. The most acceptable substitutes for these pronouns are the cumbersome and pedantic expressions he or she, he/she, (s)he, his or her, etc.: • If a child is slow to learn, he or she will be given extra tuition. • The candidate must pay his or her own travelling expenses.

In some cases, the problem may be avoided by restructuring the sentence, making the subject plural, or both: • Travelling expenses must be paid by the candidate. • Candidates must pay their own travelling expenses. • Children who are slow to learn will be given extra tuition.

• Various attempts to coin new pronouns, such as sihe, tey, sheh, etc., have met with little success; it has also been suggested that the pronoun it, already used of babies, should be extended to human beings of all ages. The solution most often resorted to now is the previously criticized use of they, them, their, and theirs as singular pronouns (see they).

herd see HEARD or HERD?

gereditary or heredity? Hereditary is an adjective, meaning 'genetically transmitted' or 'inherited'; heredity is the noun from which it is derived: • The disease is not hereditary. • Is intelligence determined by heredity or environment?

• The two words are sometimes confused, being similar in pronunciation (the a of hereditary is often elided in speech).

heritage or inheritance? The noun heritage most frequently refers to cultural items, natural features, or traditions of the past that are handed down from generation to generation and are considered to be of importance to modern society: • The pyramids are part of Egypt's heritage. An inheritance is money or property that an heir receives from an ancestor who has died: • He squandered his inheritance.

• Inheritance may also refer to the inheriting of physical or mental characteristics from one's parents. In its broader sense, heritage denotes anything that one inherits at birth; it is thus interchangeable to some degree with inheritance: • The family's rich intellectual heritage/inheritance.

Some people dislike the indiscriminate application of the word heritage to any historical event, building, custom, etc., especially as a means of exploiting its commercial potential in the tourism industry: • heritage tours of the docklands. • Tourism and the heritage industry inevitably distort the past by making imitations of historic buildings or changing their use (The Guardian).

hero or heroine? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

hesitance, hesitancy or hesitation? The nouns hesitance and hesitancy refer to the state of being hesitant (i.e. wavering, irresolute, indecisive, reluctant, etc.). Hesitancy is the more frequent of these synonyms: • There was a note of hesitancy in her voice. The noun hesitation refers to the act or an instance of hesitating: • after a slight hesitation • He accepted the offer without hesitation.

heterogeneous This word is often mis-spelt. Note the -ous ending.

hew or hue? Hew is a verb meaning 'cut', 'carve', or 'cut down': • He hewed down the tree. • They hewed a road through the jungle. It should not be confused with the noun hue, which means 'colour' or 'shade of colour': • The walls are painted in two hues of pink.

hiatus The noun hiatus is best avoided where gap, break, or pause would be adequate or more appropriate: • a hiatus in our discussions.

hiccup or hiccough? Both spellings of this word are acceptable but hiccup is the more frequent.

• The word refers to a sudden intake of breath resulting in a characteristic sound. It has the additional informal sense of 'small problem': • The project is going well apart from a few minor hiccups.

hidden agenda The phrase hidden agenda is generally used in a derogatory manner, referring to a secret intention or ulterior motive concealed behind a public statement, political policy, etc.: • Ministers have assured their critics that there is no hidden agenda. The phrase is regarded by some people as a vogue cliché and should not be overused.

high or tall? Both these adjectives mean 'of greater than average size, measured vertically', but there are differences of sense, usage, and application between them: • a high mountain • a tall woman.
high-profile

- The adjective tall is largely restricted to people, animals, and plants and to things that are narrow in proportion to their height; it is the opposite of short: • a tall tree • a tall chimney. High has the additional meaning of ‘situated at a great distance above the base’; it is the opposite of low: • a high branch • a high shelf.

The two adjectives may be applied to the same noun in different senses: a high window is a long way from the floor; a tall window is relatively large from top to bottom. The size of the high window and the position of the tall window are unspecified.

Like other adjectives of magnitude (long, deep, wide, etc.), high and tall are used in combination with specific measurements regardless of size: • He is only five feet tall. • The wall is less than one metre high.

high-profile see PROFILE.

hijack The verb hijack, meaning ‘seize control of (a vehicle in transit)’, is increasingly used in figurative contexts: • The plane has been hijacked by terrorists. • One of their most successful authors has been hijacked by a rival company.

Highjack is a rare variant spelling of the verb.

him or his? see -ING FORMS.

Hindi or Hindi? Hindi is a language of India; Hindi is a noun or adjective relating to the Indian religion of Hinduism: • She speaks Hindi. • He is (a) Hindu. The two words should not be confused.

hire or rent? Both verbs mean ‘have or give temporary use of something in return for payment’: • He hired a suit for the wedding. • We rented a flat in the town centre. • They hire/rent (out) cars at competitive rates.

The basic difference in sense between the two verbs concerns the length of the period of temporary use and, to some extent, the nature of the item in question: a room or building may be hired for a party or conference or rented for a longer period of time. Clothes are hired (usually for a single occasion), not rented; television sets are rented (sometimes for a number of years), not hired. Cars may be hired or rented.

The verbs let and lease are also used in this context, usually with reference to buildings or land: • She lets the cottage to tourists. • Room to let. • They leased the land from the council. • The council leased the land. • All the company cars are leased. The subject of let is usually the owner of the property rather than the person who pays for temporary use.

his or her see HE or SHE.

Hispanic The noun Hispanic has become an accepted term for a Spanish-speaking person from Central or South America living in the USA, alongside Latino and Chicano.

historic or historical? The adjective historic relates to events, decisions, etc., that are memorable or important enough to earn a place in recorded history; historical relates to the study of history and to the past in general: • a historic election • historical records: The king’s visit to the town was not a historic occasion, it is of historical interest only. The adjective historical is also applied to people, events, etc., that existed or happened in fact, as opposed to fiction or legend: • a historical character.

The two adjectives are not fully interchangeable, although both may be applied to the same noun. A historic voyage, for example, is contrasted with one that is of no lasting significance, whereas a historical voyage is contrasted with one that never took place: the voyage of Christopher Columbus to the New World was both historic and historical.

See also A or AN?

Some people dislike the overuse of historic with reference to events that are of ephemeral significance: • Western Samoa produced the first major upset of the World Cup with a historic victory over Wales . . . (The Guardian).

histronic or hysterical? The adjectives histronic and hysterical are both used of emotional outbursts but should not be confused: histronic behaviour is a display of insincerity, being deliberately exaggerated for melodramatic effect; hysterical behaviour is the result of an involuntary loss of control.

The same distinction may be applied to the nouns histronics and hysterics, both of which are used with plural verbs, adjectives, etc., in this context (see -ICS).

Histronics and histronic originally referred to actors and the theatre; hysterics and hysterical also relate to the mental disorder of hysteria.

hi-tech The adjective hi-tech specifically refers to high technology, or sophisticated electronics; its indiscriminate application to
basic electrical appliances or to anything remotely connected with computing is disliked by many careful users: • a beautiful hi-tech modern home • high-tech benefits [a reference to the computerization of the social security benefits system] • This transition of the cycle from leisure 'toy' to hi-tech pedal machine (Daily Telegraph).

The word hi-tech has a number of variant spellings: high-tech, high tech, hi tec, hi-tech, etc. It is also used as a noun: • Reflecting the world of high tech [spelt hi-tech in the headline], the first museum devoted to the chemical industry opens today (The Guardian).

hoard or horde? A hoard is 'a store reserved for future use'; a horde is 'a large crowd': • horde of tourists.
◆ These words are often confused, as they have the same pronunciation.

hoaarse or horse? House describes a voice that is rasping or harsh, typically as the result of an infection or through overuse. It should not be confused with horse, which refers to the animal.

hoi polloi This phrase of Greek origin, referring to the common populace, is often misspelt. Note the -oi ending of both words. Because hoi means 'the' in Greek, it is technically redundant, but the phrase is firmly established in English.
◆ The phrase is pronounced [hɔi pɔlɔi].

holy, holey or wholly? These three spellings should not be confused. The adjective holy means 'sacred'; the adjective holey, only used facetiously or informally, means 'having holes'; the adverb wholly means 'completely': • holy relics • holey socks • wholly convinced.
◆ holly and hoary are pronounced [ˈhɒli]; the pronunciation of wholly ([ˈhɒli]) reflects the -al-spelling.

home or house? The word home may refer to an actual building where a person has his or her residence, but varies from house in conveying affection, even sentimental, sense of 'place of refuge' or 'retreat from the world': • Home is where the heart is. • I'm tired and I want to go home.
◆ He has no home to go to. Home is also useful for describing buildings that are not houses, such as flats. House generally refers more dispassionately to a place of residence, usually a single-family dwelling as distinct from a flat or other type of residence: • All the houses in this street are due for demolition.
◆ Note that home in the sense of 'care facility', in such uses as retirement home or home for the mentally disabled, is disliked by many people, including those who live in or run such places: • They put the old lady in a home. • He should be in a home.

homely In British English the adjective homely is complimentary, meaning 'like home', 'unpretentious', or 'sympathetic'; in American English it has the derogatory sense of 'ugly' or 'unattractive': • a homely room • a homely child.
◆ Misunderstanding is most likely to occur when the adjective is applied to a person, in which case it may be replaced by an appropriate synonym.

homogeneity The traditional pronunciation of this word, derived from homogenous (see HOMOGENOUS or HOMOGENOUS?) is [həməˈdʒiːnəs], although [həməˈdʒiːnətɪ] is sometimes heard.

homogeneous or homogenous? These two adjectives are virtually interchangeable in the sense of 'similar, identical, or uniform in nature, structure, or composition', homogeneous being the more frequent: • a homogeneous mixture.
◆ In biology, the adjective homogenous specifically refers to correspondence or similarity due to common descent.

The two words are closer in spelling and mean-
homograph

homograph, homonym or homophone?
A homonym is a word that has the same spelling or pronunciation as another word. There are two kinds of homonym: homograph and homophone.

- A homograph is a word that is spelt like another word, but has a different meaning or origin. For example, rush, 'a slender marsh plant', from Old English risc and rush, 'to move quickly', from Middle French ruser, 'to put to flight'. Homographs need not have the same pronunciation, e.g., read, 'to guide', rhyming with feed, and the metal lead, rhyming with head.

- A homophone is a word that is pronounced in the same way as another but with a different meaning, derivation, or spelling. Examples are hear, here; rain, reign; right, write; son, sun.

homophobia
The noun homophobia, meaning 'fear or dislike of homosexuals', and the derived noun homophobe and adjective homophobic are used with increasing frequency. The Church has been accused of homophobia. A homophobic police officer. Some people object to these coinages, on the basis that the homo- element can only mean 'same' (as in the word homosexual itself) or 'man'.

homophone
See homograph, homonym or homophone?

homosexual
This word may be pronounced in several ways, two of the most frequent being [hombaɪʊsəl] and [homəʊsɛkˈriːəl].

- Some people prefer [hombaɪ] to [həʊmə]- because, in this case, homo is from the Greek homo 'same' and not the Latin homo 'man'.

See also Adverbs: Sentence Adverb.

horrible, horrid, horrific or horrendous?
Horrible and horrid are virtually interchangeable in the sense of 'very unpleasant'; horrific and horrendous convey a stronger sense of horror: a horrific sight; a horrible dream; a horrific attack; the horrendous prospect of nuclear war.

- All four adjectives are ultimately derived from the Latin verb horrère, meaning 'to tremble or bristle (with fear)'; in formal contexts they are principally used in the sense of 'causing fear or dread'.

The use of horrible and horrid to mean 'disagreeable' or 'unkind'; a horrid man; a horrible meal, is best restricted to informal contexts, as is the use of horrendous to describe exorbitant prices, very bad weather, etc.

hors d'oeuvre
An hors d'oeuvre is an item of food served before or as the first course of a meal. Of French origin, the phrase is sometimes misspelt; note particularly the
vowel sequence -oou-. The two words are sometimes hyphenated: • hors d'oüeurs.

• The plural is usually hors d'oeuvres, but hors d'oeuvre, without the final -s, is also acceptable.

The anglicized pronunciation of hors d'oeuvre is [or d'örv] or [or derv]; the h- and s are silent. If the final -s of the plural form hors d'oeuvres is sounded, the pronunciation is [or derv2]; it can be difficult to say [or dervz].

horse see HOARSE or HORSE?

hospitable This word may be stressed on the first syllable [hospitābl] or the second syllable [hospitəbl]. Some users prefer the former, more traditional pronunciation.

hospitalize The verb hospitalize, meaning 'send or admit to hospital', is disliked by some users as an example of the increasing tendency to coin new verbs by adding the suffix -ize to nouns and adjectives: • She was hospitalized in the eighth month of her pregnancy.

host The verb host, meaning 'act as host at' or 'be the host of', is disliked by some users: • He hosted the firm's Christmas party. • She is host to the BBC's new quiz show.

See also GUEST.

host or hostess? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

-hostile see -FRIENDLY.

hot desking This contemporary business term refers to the practice of working at whatever work space is available or is most convenient rather than at a designated workstation or desk: • We believe hot desking promotes efficiency. As a vogue term, hot desking is considered jargonistic by many people and is best restricted to informal contexts.

See also DESK DINING, DUVET DAY, DRESS-DOWN DAY.

hour or our? The words hour and our are both pronounced [LOUR] but have different meanings and should not be confused. Hour denotes a period of time, while our means 'belonging to us'.

house see HOME or HOUSE?

hove see HEAVED or HOUSE?

however The principal adverbial senses of however are 'nevertheless', 'in whatever way', and no matter how: • The car doesn't have a large boot; it does, however, have plenty of room inside. • However I wash my hair, and however carefully I dry it, it always looks untidy. For the distinction between however and how ever see WHATEVER or WHAT EVER?

• In the sense of 'nevertheless', however often serves the same purpose as but; careful users avoid using both words in the same sentence or clause unless however is being used in one of its other senses: • The girl screamed; she did not, however, try to escape. • The girl screamed, but she did not try to escape. • The girl struggled, but however hard she tried, she could not escape.

Some users always separate however (in the sense of 'nevertheless') from the rest of the sentence with commas or other punctuation marks; others use punctuation marks only where there is a possibility of ambiguity or confusion.

See also COMMA 4.

In the sense of 'nevertheless', however is usually placed immediately after the word or phrase that it serves to contrast or emphasize: • my friend however, does not like the colour suggests that I like the colour but my friend does not; my friend does not, however, like like the colour suggests that my friend likes some other feature of the object in question but does not like the colour.

Some users object to the positioning of however (in the sense of 'nevertheless') at the beginning or end of a sentence or clause; however, this is generally acceptable in most contexts.

See also ALTHOUGH or HOWEVER?

hue see HEW or HUE?

hullo see HELLO, HALLO or HULLO?

human Some people dislike the use of human as a noun, preferring human being (or man, woman, child, person, etc.): • This job can be done more efficiently by a robot than by a human (being).

• Most dictionaries acknowledge the noun human as a synonym for human being.

See also INHUMAN or INHUMANE?

humanism or humanity? Humanism is a philosophy that values human beings and rejects the need for religion. The noun humanity refers to human beings collectively; it also means 'kindness': • for the sake of humanity. The two nouns should not be confused.

• Humanism also refers to a cultural movement of the Renaissance.

The humanities are academic subjects such as history, art, literature, language, and philosophy, as distinct from science.
humanist

humanist or humanitarian? A humanist is a person who supports the philosophy of humanism (see humanism or humanity?); a humanitarian is a philanthropist, a person who works for the welfare of human beings.

- The word humanitarian is also used as an adjective; a humanitarian organization.

humanity see humanism or humanity?

humiliation or humility? Humiliation is a feeling of shame, embarrassment, or loss of pride sometimes caused deliberately by other people; humility is the quality of being humble or modest; the humiliation of failure the man’s humility.

humorist The noun humorist, meaning ‘humorous writer, speaker, etc.’, is often misspelt. As in the adjective HUMOROUS, the -our ending of humour is changed to -mor before the suffix -ist.

humorous This word, meaning ‘amusing or funny’, is often misspelt. The second u of humour is dropped before the suffix -ous.
- Humorous must not be confused with human, the long bone in the upper arm.

hung see hanged or hung?

hygiene This word, meaning ‘science of ensuring good health’, is often misspelt. Note hy- and not he- at the beginning of the word, and the -ie in the middle.

hype The word hype, used as a noun or verb with reference to extravagant and often deceptive publicity of books, films, etc., is generally regarded as a slang term; the launch oved more to hype than to literary merit (Sunday Times). The biggest money-making hype in sports history (Publisher: Weekly). Hying books is big business (The Bookseller).
- The word is of uncertain origin; many authorities associate it with the slang use of hipe as an abbreviation for hypodermic; others have suggested a connection with the prefix hyper-, meaning ‘excessive’, as in hypoderm.

hyper- or hypo-? These two prefixes are often confused. This may result in misunderstanding when each is joined to its relevant suffix. Hyper- means ‘above or excessively’: a hyperactive child; hypo- means ‘beneath or under’: a hypodermic syringe.
- The prefix hyper- is increasingly used as an adjective in its own right, in the sense of ‘hyperactive’.

hyperbola or hyperbole? These two nouns should not be confused. Hyperbola is a technical term used in mathematics to describe a type of symmetrical curve; hyperbole means ‘exaggeration used for effect in speech or writing’; I’ve warned him a million times is an example of hyperbole. Both nouns originate from the same Greek word and they share the derived adjective hyperbolic(al).
- Note that the final -e of hyperbole is pronounced, producing the four-syllable word [ihper-ból]. Hyperbola is pronounced [ihperbóla].

hypercritical see hypocritical or hypercritical?

hyphen The principal uses of the hyphen in English are to join two or more words together, either as a fixed compound or to avoid ambiguity, and to indicate that a word has been broken at the end of a line through lack of space.
- There are a number of other situations in which the use of the hyphen is optional.

1 Most standard prefixes are attached without a hyphen: unimportant, multi-coloured, prefabricated.
- Some users prefer to hyphenate words prefixed with non- and words in which the absence of the hyphen would result in a word with a doubled vowel: non-flammable, pre-eminent, co-ordinate.
- Such words are widely and increasingly accepted in the single-word forms: non-flammable, pre-eminent, coordinate, etc. However, the double i of words prefixed by anti-, semi-, etc., is usually split by a hyphen: anti-inflationary, semi-independent.
- Words prefixed with ex- (in the sense of ‘former’) and self- are usually hyphenated: ex-wife, self-sufficient.
- A hyphen is sometimes inserted after the prefix to avoid ambiguity or confusion; for example, to distinguish between the nouns co-op (a cooperative) and coop (an enclosure), or between the verbs re-cover and recover (see also re), and to clarify the pronunciation and meaning of such words as device.
- See also co.
- A hyphen is always used to join a prefix
to a word beginning with a capital letter: • anti-British • un-Christian.
See also -LIKE

2 Many compounds can be written with or without a hyphen, depending on convention, frequency of usage, the writer's personal preference, or the publisher's house style: • dining room or dining-room • hard-hearted or hardhearted • boy-friend or boyfriend. There is a growing tendency towards minimal hyphenation, with the substitution of two words or one word as appropriate.

Some fixed compounds of three or more words, such as son-in-law, happy-go-lucky, etc., are always hyphenated: two-word compound adjectives in which the second element ends in -ed, such as light-hearted, blue-eyed, short-sighted, etc., are usually hyphenated (see also 4 below).

Some compounds derived from phrasal verbs are always hyphenated: • broken-down; some are always solid (not hyphenated): • breakthrough; others may be hyphenated or solid: • takeover or take-over • run-down or rundown.

3 Compounds of two or more words used adjectivally before the noun they qualify are usually hyphenated: • a used-car dealer • sell used cars • a plain-chocolate biscuit is coated with plain chocolate • a three-month-old baby is three months old • a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity occurs only once in a lifetime. These hyphens are often essential to avoid ambiguity: • a red-wine bottle is a bottle for red wine; • a red wine bottle may be a wine bottle that is red.

4 Adjectives or participles preceded by an adverb are not hyphenated if the adverb ends in -ly: • a neatly written letter • a letter that is neatly written. Compounds containing other adverbs, especially those that may be mistaken for adjectives (well, ill, best, little, half, etc.) are usually hyphenated when they are used adjectivally before a noun, to avoid ambiguity: • a half-cooked loaf • his best-known novel. When such compounds occur after the noun, the hyphen is sometimes optional.

5 A common element need not be repeated in groups of two or more hyphenated compounds but the hyphen must not be omitted; the same convention applies to solid compounds, in which the common element may be replaced by a hyphen: • long- or short-haired dogs • salesmen and -women. Some users dislike this convention, preferring to retain the full compound in all cases.

6 A hyphen is inserted when numbers between 21 and 99 are written out in full: • twenty-one • thirty-seven • eighty-six • four hundred and fifty-three.

A hyphen is used when fractions are written out, to separate the numerator and denominator: • three-tenths • thirteen-sixteenths • two-thirds.

7 The other major use of the hyphen is at the end of a line, splitting a word that is to be continued at the beginning of the next line.

There are a number of conventions relating to the points at which a word may be divided; these recommended breaks are marked in some dictionaries. There is an increasing tendency for word division to be influenced by phonetic rather than etymological principles • photog-rapher [fotógraf], not photo-grapher.

A word should always be split between syllables, ideally at a natural break after an existing hyphen; between the elements of a one-word compound; after a prefix, such as semi-, inter-, etc.; or before a suffix, such as -ness, -ment, etc. Words of one syllable should not be broken. Words should not be broken immediately after the first letter or immediately before the last.

It is also important to ensure that the letters on either side of the break will not mislead the reader, especially if they form a word in their own right: • mask-rate • the-rapist • mans-laughter • not-able • roar-range • homes-pun • leg-end, and that the hyphen will not be mistaken for a fixed hyphen: • re-creation • un-ionized • de-crease • ex-tractor.

8 In handwritten and typewritten texts a hyphen is often used in place of a DASH.

hypo- see HYPER or HYPO-

hypocrisy The noun hypocrisy is sometimes misspelt, a common error being the substitution of -cacy (as in democracy) for the -cry ending. Note also the prefix hyp-, not hyper-.
hypocritical or hypercritical? These two words are often confused. Hypocritical means 'insincere' or 'two-faced'; hypercritical means 'excessively critical': • It would be hypocritical of me to say I enjoyed the concert, when really I thought it was awful. • He's so hypercritical about the way I lay the table.

As well as being misspelt, these words are sometimes mispronounced. Hypocritical is pronounced [ˈhipəkritɪk], hypercritical is pronounced [ˈhipəkritɪk].

hysterical, hysterics see histrionic or hysterical?
I or me? The subject pronoun I and the object pronoun me are sometimes confused in informal speech, especially in the phrases It’s me and between you and I.

- After verbs and prepositions, the object pronoun me should be used: before verbs, the subject pronoun I should be used: • They have invited my mother, my father, and me (not I) to the wedding. • He works with Mary and me (not I).

- My friend and I (not me) will help. Confusion and errors occur in the highest places: • She could give a better answer than that to I and to my honourable friends (said during Prime Minister’s Question Time).

These problems rarely arise when the pronoun stands alone; any confusion may therefore be resolved by mentally removing the other item(s) and assessing the result: • They have invited me to the wedding. • He works with me. • I will help.

The verb to be, according to grammatical convention, is an exception: in formal contexts it is me is unacceptable to a few careful users, who prefer it is I. However, in informal contexts the idiomatic It’s me is generally considered to be more natural than the pedantic It’s I and is acceptable to most users.

See also it.

The phrase between you and I is avoided by many users in all contexts, although it is often heard in informal speech. Between you and me, which conforms to grammatical convention, is the preferred usage.

See also AS; LET; MYSELF; PRONOUNS; THAN.

-ible see -ABLE or -IBLE?

-ic or -ical? Many adjectives are formed by the addition of the suffixes -ic or -ical: • cubic • symmetrical • phonetic • geographical.

- Sometimes either suffix may be added to the same root. The pairs of words thus created may be virtually interchangeable, such as: • metric-metrical • philosop-philosophical, although one is usually more frequent or more specialized than the other. In other pairs the two words may differ in meaning or usage: see CLASSIC or CLASSICAL?; COMIC or COMICAL?; ECONOMIC or ECONOMICAL?; ELECTRIC or ELECTRICAL?; HISTORIC or HISTORICAL?; MAGIC or MAGICAL?; POLITICAL or POLITICAL?

Some adjectives, especially those related to nouns ending in -ic, are found only in the -ical form: a critic may be critical; a sceptic is sceptical.

- Other terms are conjunctive, that is, equally valid for singular and plural: • singularities • accuracies • differentials • characteristics.

- Such adjectives are clearly plural in meaning: • singularities • accuracies • differentials • characteristics.

- With the exception of political and public, all adjectives derived from adjectives ending in -ic or -ical have the suffix -ically: • tragically • critically.

-ics A number of words ending in -ics may be singular or plural nouns, depending on the sense in which they are used: • acoustics is the study of sound. • The acoustics of the room have been improved and are now excellent.

- Such nouns are usually singular when they denote a science or some other area of study or activity. • Mathematics was not my favourite subject at school. • Gymnastics is just one of her many hobbies. • Economics is taught in the sixth form, but politics is not on the curriculum.

- In other contexts, the same nouns may become plural, when they refer to a system, set of principles, group of activities, etc. • His politics are very left-wing. • What are the economics of the coal industry?

- Some nouns, such as tactics, statistics, and ethics, may be singular or plural as described above but also exist in a singular -ic form: • military tactics • vital statistics • professional ethics • her latest tactic • an alarming statistic • the work ethic.

- Nouns relating to behaviour, such as heroin and hysteric, are usually plural.

See also SINGULAR or PLURAL?

identical with or identical to? The adjective identical may be followed by with or to: • This picture is identical with/to the one we saw in the shop.

- Some users dislike the phrase identical to, considering with to be the more acceptable preposition in this context.

identify Some people dislike the frequent use of identify as a synonym for ‘associate’,
idioms

'link', or 'connect': • They have been identified with a number of extreme right-wing organisations.

• In the sense of 'share the ideas or feelings of', identify with is sometimes used reflexively: • I cannot identify (myself) with the heroine.

In commercial and bureaucratic contexts, identify is increasingly used as a synonym for 'find', 'discover', or 'recognise': • to identify a gap in the market.

An idiom is a more or less fixed expression, such as out of hand, in spite of, to come into one's own, or a storm in a teacup, the meaning of which is distinct from the individual senses of the words it contains.

See also metaphors; similes.

• Many idioms, such as • have egg on one's face 'be shown to be foolish' and • be dog tired 'be very tired after exertion' are best restricted to informal contexts; others, such as • the salt of the earth 'people regarded as having praiseworthy qualities', are acceptable at all levels.

idioms This word is often misspelt, the most frequent error occurring when the ending -way is replaced by -acy. The correct ending is like fantasy and not like privacy.

• Note also that i and y each occurs twice.

idle, idol or idyll? The adjective idle means 'not active; lazy': • an idle machine • an idle fellow. An idol is an object of worship or admiration: • a pop idol • They bowed before the idol. An idyll is (a piece of writing that depicts) a pleasant or idealised scene or situation: • an idyll of life on the Pacific island.

• Idle and idol are sometimes confused, being identical in pronunciation: [id]l. Idyll is pronounced with a short initial [i] (i-dill).

Idyll is more usually found in the derived adjectival word idyllic.

idyllic The first i of idyllic is usually pronounced as in ill, although it may be pronounced as in stem.

• The stress occurs on the second syllable in both cases: [id-lík] or [id-lík].

i.e. see e.g. and e.t.

if The use of if in place of though often causes ambiguity: • The work, if difficult, is rewarding. • The service was good, if not excellent.

• The first of these examples may mean 'the work is difficult but rewarding' or 'difficult work is rewarding'. It is impossible to ascertain from the second example whether the service was excellent or not.

The use of if in place of whether may also be confusing in certain contexts: • Ask him if it is raining probably means 'ask him whether it is raining (or not)', but it may also mean 'if it is raining, ask him for a lift, to close the window, etc.'

See also subjunctive: were or was?

WHETHER.

if and when Many people object to the frequent use of the phrase if and when, which can usually be replaced by if or when alone: • We'll move to a larger house if and when we start a family.

• The phrase sometimes serves a useful purpose, however. In the example above the users may not wish to commit themselves on the subject of parenthood: if would imply doubt; when would imply certainty.

ignoramus The only plural form of the noun ignoramus, which means 'ignorant person', is ignoramuses. Although the word is of Latin origin, implying a possible ending in the plural (see PLURALS), it is not a noun in Latin but a verb, meaning 'we do not know'.

ilk The use of ilk as a synonym for 'type' or 'sort', in the phrase of that ilk, is widely accepted in many contexts but is disliked by some users: • Barbara Cartland and other writers of that ilk. The word that is sometimes replaced by your, their, his, her, etc.: • Barbara Cartland and other writers of her ilk.

• The phrase of that ilk is traditionally used to denote the landed gentry of Scotland, meaning 'of that estate': • Glengarry of that ilk is Glengarry, laird of Glengarry, in such contexts the phrase is often misinterpreted as 'of that family'.

ill see sick or ill?

illegal see illicit, illegal or illegitimate?

illegible or eligible? The adjective eligible, meaning 'qualified, suitable, worthy': • to be eligible for a competition • an eligible bachelor, should not be confused with illegible (see illegible or unreadable?).

• Note the differences in spelling between the two words, particularly the -il- and -i- vowel sequence of illegible and the -i- and -e- vowel sequence of eligible.
illegible is stressed on the second syllable, [ɪlɪˈɡɪl]; eligible on the first, [ɪlˈɪdʒəbəl].

**legible** or **unreadable**? The adjective **illegible** describes something that cannot be deciphered and is therefore impossible to read; **unreadable** means 'uninteresting' or 'badly worded', describing something that cannot be read with enjoyment, ease, or understanding: • Her handwriting is illegible. • He has produced another unreadable novel. • The document is unreadable; it must be reordered.

- Unreadable may be used as a synonym for 'illegible' in certain contexts, but it can cause ambiguity. • This paragraph is totally unreadable may be a criticism either of the handwriting (or printing quality) or of the content or wording.

**illegitimate** see **illicit, illegal**, or **illegitimate**?

**illicit** or **elicit**? The adjective **illicit** (see **illicit, illegal**, or **illegitimate**) should not be confused with the verb **elicit**, meaning 'draw out' or 'evoke': • illicit dealings • to elicit the truth.

- The two words have the same pronunciation ([ɪˈlɪst]).

**illicit, illegal**, or **illegitimate**? All these adjectives mean 'unlawful', but there are differences of sense, usage, and application between them: • illicit trade • illegal parking • an illegitimate attack.

- Illicit means 'not permitted or approved by law': • The Government should seek the co-operation of the unions, business and revenue authorities to eradicate illicit and irregular earnings (Daily Telegraph). The word is also used to describe something that is contrary to social custom: • an illicit relationship.

- See also **illicit, elicit**?

**illegal** means 'forbidden by law': • The possession of such weapons without a licence is illegal in this country. The word is also used to describe something that contravenes the regulations of a sport, etc.: • an illegal tackle.

- The adjective **illegitimate** is principally applied to children born of unmarried parents: • the president's illegitimate daughter. It also describes something that defies reason or logic: • an illegitimate explanation.

**illusion** see **allusion, illusion or delusion**?

**illusive, illusory** see **allusive, elusive or illusive**

**illustrative** In British English the adjective **illustrative**, as in: • illustrative examples, is stressed on the first syllable, [ɪllˈstrətɪv]. In American English the second syllable is stressed, [ɪllˈstrətɪv].

**image** The frequent use of **image** as a synonym for 'reputation' is disliked by some users: • This scandal will not be good for the president's image.

- In many contexts, however, image has a wider range of meaning than reputation: an advertising campaign can improve the image, but not necessarily the reputation, of a political party, for example. The reputation of a person, product, organization, etc., is based largely on past performance; the word image denotes a more general impression, which may also be influenced by presentation, appearance, association, etc.

**imaginary** or **imaginative**? **Imaginary** means 'unreal' or 'existing only in the imagination'; **imaginative** means 'having or showing a vivid or creative imagination': • an imaginary house • an imaginative designer • an imaginative story.

- The two adjectives are not interchangeable, although both may occasionally be applied to the same noun: • an imaginary friend does not exist; an imaginative friend has a lively imagination.

- Note the spelling of **imaginary**, particularly the -ary (not -ery) ending.

**imbroglio** An **imbrogliao** is a confused situation: • a political imbroglio. Note the spelling of this word, particularly the silent g. It is used in formal contexts and is of Italian origin; the anglicized pronunciation is [ɪmˈbrɔljo].

- The plural is formed by adding -s, not -es: imbroglios.

**I mean** The phrase **I mean** may be used in informal speech to clarify, expand, or correct a previous statement, question, etc.: • Is your foot very painful, I mean too painful to walk on? • She lives in Plymouth, I mean Portsmouth.

- In some contexts the phrase serves no useful purpose and may be omitted: • You could have bought a new umbrella, I mean they're not very expensive.

**immanent** see **EMINENT, IMMINENT OR IMMA-NENT?**

**immigrant** see **EMIGRANT OR IMMIGRANT?**
imminent

imminent see EMINENT, IMMINENT or IMMENSITY?

immoral see AMORAL or IMMORAL?

immovable or immovable? Note that both immovable and immovable are considered acceptable spellings of the word: • The chandelier proved immovable. • He inherited the property together with various immovable.

immune from or immune to? The adjective immune is followed by in the literal sense of ‘protected against or resistant to disease and figurative extensions of this sense: • The plant is immune to fungal disease. • She is immune to criticism. In the figurative sense of ‘exempt’, immune is followed by from: • Nobody is immune from punishment.

immunity or impurity? Immunity is exemption or freedom from obligation or duty; impurity is exemption or freedom from punishment or harm. • Diplomatic immunity provides foreign ambassadors with immunity from taxation and enables them to infringe the law with impunity.

Impunity is a restricted form of immunity, the word occurs most frequently in the phrase with impurity.

Impurity also means ‘resistance to disease’: • This vaccination may not confer total immunity.

impact The use of impact as a synonym for ‘effect’, ‘impression’, or ‘influence’ is best restricted to contexts in which the effect, impression, etc., is particularly powerful: • the impact of the government’s resignation on the stock market • The new packaging has had little effect [not impact] on sales.

• Some people object to all figurative uses of the noun, reserving it for physical collisions and their effects: • the impact of the bullet on the car door.

The use of impact as a verb meaning ‘affect’ is best avoided: • The cutbacks impacted secondary education negatively could have been reworded: The cutbacks had a bad effect on secondary education. The increasing tendency to follow impact with on is especially disliked by many people: • This change will impact severely on small companies.

impasse The formal word impasse, meaning ‘deadlock; stalemate’: • to reach an impasse, is of French origin and has a number of anglicized pronunciations. The first syllable may be pronounced [am-], [im-], or [om-]; the second syllable -pahs or -pas; and the stress may be on either syllable. The pronunciation [impæs] is closest to the French.

impassioned, impassive see DISPASSIONATE, IMPASSIONED or IMPASSIVE?

impeccable This word, meaning ‘faultless’: • She spoke impeccable Italian, is often misspelt. Note particularly the -able endings as in acceptable, and not -ible as in sensible.

impel see compel or impel?

imperial or imperious? The adjective imperial means ‘of an emperor, empress, or empire’; imperious means ‘overbearing’ or ‘arrogant’: • the imperial palace • an imperious gesture.

• The two words are sometimes confused in the extended sense of imperial – ‘majestic’, ‘regal’, or ‘commanding’: imperial powers are those that are as majestic as an emperor’s, not those that are dominating and arrogant. Both are derived from the Latin noun imperium, meaning ‘command’.

The adjective imperial also refers to the British system of weights and measures (pounds and ounces, feet and inches, gallons and pints, etc.), which has now been largely replaced by the metric system.

impersonate, personate or personify?

To impersonate is to imitate or pretend to be somebody else: • The comedian impersonated Humphrey Bogart. • It is a crime to impersonate a police officer. To personify is to represent or embody something abstract or inanimate as a human being: • He personifies the greed of modern society. The rare verb personate is sometimes used in place of impersonate or personify.

impinge or infringe? Either verb may be used in the sense of ‘encroach’: • They are impinging/infringing on our rights. Note that both verbs are followed by on (or upon) in this sense. Impinge is used with more abstract nouns: • everything that impinges on our consciousness.

• To impinge on, in formal contexts, also means to strike: • The bullet impinged on the side of the vehicle. Infringe, used transitively without on, means ‘break’ or ‘violate’: • to infringe the rules.

impious This word should be stressed on the first syllable [impiəs].
implement The verb implement is best avoided where carry out, fulfil, accomplish, or put into action would be adequate or more appropriate: • His absence will enable us to carry out [not implement] our plan.

implicate Originally a legal term, the verb implicate is widely used in official contexts: • The company has been ordered to implement safety measures as a result of the accident.

As a noun, implicate denotes a tool or instrument: • agricultural implements. There is a slight difference in pronunciation between the verb and the noun: the final syllable of the verb is sounded [-ment], rhyming with tent; the final syllable of the noun is unstressed [-mient], as in garment.

implicit See explicit or implicit?

imply or infer? The verb imply means 'suggest' or 'hint at'; infer means 'deduce' or 'conclude': • She implied that there would be some redundancies in the factory. • I inferred from what she said that there would be some redundancies in the factory. To imply involves speech, writing, or action; to infer involves listening, reading, or observation.

The two verbs are frequently confused, infer being used in place of imply, to the extent that some dictionaries now list 'imply' as an additional sense of infer. Many people object to this usage, however; it is therefore advisable to maintain the distinction between the two words. Similarly, the noun inference is sometimes used instead of implication, but it is preferable to maintain the distinction between these two words: • the implications [not the inferences] of the report.

Infer is stressed on the second syllable; the final r is doubled before -ed, -ing, and -er. The noun inference, in which the stress shifts to the first syllable, has a single r.

See also spelling 1.

important or importantly? More important (short for what is more important) is sometimes regarded as an adverbial phrase, the adjective important being changed to importantly: • His assistants are very conscientious and, importantly, they are utterly trustworthy.

The phrase more important is preferred by many users in formal contexts, although more importantly is becoming increasingly acceptable.

impostor or impostor? This word, meaning 'person who fraudulently pretends to be another person', has two spellings, though the spelling impostor is more frequently used than imposter.

impractical or impracticable? See practical or practicable?

impresario An impresario is a theatrical producer or sponsor. Note the spelling of the word, particularly the single s, unlike impress. The usual pronunciation is [imˈprɛsərɪəʊ]; the variant [ɪmˈprɛsərɪəʊ] is disliked by some people.

• The plural is formed by adding -s, not -es: impresarios.

improvisation or improviser? See extemporize or extemporiser?

improve This word is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the -ise ending, which does not have -ise as a variant (see -ize or 4se).•

impugn or impugne? These words, both of which are formal, are sometimes confused. To impugn is to question the integrity of, implying that someone is not being honourable: • to dare to impugn his motives. To impune is to attribute, sometimes unjustly: • it is grossly unfair to impune blame for the crime to them.

impunity See immunity or impunity?

impute See impugn or impugne?

in See at or in?; into or in to?

inaccessible Note the spelling of this adjective, particularly the single -in-, the -cc- and -ss-, and the -ible ending.

inapt or inept? The adjective inapt means 'inappropriate' or 'unsuitable'; its synonym inept is more frequently used in the sense of 'incompetent' or 'clumsy': • an inapt companion • an inept mechanic.

Both adjectives are ultimately derived from the Latin word aptus, meaning 'fit', and the negative prefix in-; inept entered the English language via the Latin adjective ineptus.

inasmuch as This phrase may also be written in as much as, although inasmuch as is far more frequent: • The result was inasmuch as it demonstrated the power of the individual.

See also in so far as.

incentive The noun incentive is followed by the preposition to or for: • an incentive to [or for] their employees to work harder.
incident  The noun incident is frequently used in the mass media to denote an action or occurrence that has or is likely to have serious, violent, or political consequences: • The incident sparked off a wave of anti-
globalism protests.

• In other contexts the noun incident is principally used with reference to events of minor importance: • The unfortunate incident was soon forgotten.

Incidents, the plural form, should not be confused with incidence, which means 'occurrence', 'rate', or 'frequency': • The incidence of crime has fallen in recent months.

include or comprise? Include and comprise are similar in meaning but not identical. Include is less restrictive than comprise, suggesting that the things cited are part of a greater number or range of things, while comprise implies that the things cited are the entirety of the things under discussion: • The list includes a number of conditions. • The document comprises a full confession.

incomparable This word, meaning 'without comparison', is often mispronounced. The stress falls on the second syllable and not the third. The correct pronunciation is [ɪnˈkɑmpərəbl].

incongruous see CONGRUENT or CONGRUOUS?

incontrovertible The adjective incontrovertible, meaning 'undeniable; indisputable', and the derived adverb incontrovertibly, are sometimes misspelt. Note the -ible (not -able) ending. Another frequent error is the substitution of -a- for the second -o-.

incredible or incredulous? Incredible means 'unbelievable'; incredulous means 'disbelieving': • He told her an incredible story. • She looked at him with an incredulous expression.

• The use of the adjective incredible in the sense of 'wonderful' or 'amazing' should be restricted to informal contexts: • We had an incredible holiday. See also CREDIBLE, CREDIBILE or CREDULOUS?

indecent see DECENT or DECOROUS?

indefinite article see A or AN?

indefinitely This word is often misspelt, the most common error being the substitution of an an for the final i.

• It is worth remembering that the word finite has the same sequence of vowels.

independence and independent These words are sometimes misspelt, the most frequent error being the substitution of an an for the final e.

• Note, however, that the noun dependant, 'person who relies on another for financial support', is spelt with a final a.

in-depth The adjective in-depth is disliked by many users; it can usually be replaced by thorough or detailed, for which it is an unnecessary synonym: • an in-depth knowledge of the latest electronic equipment • an in-depth study of child abuse.

indexes or indices? The noun index has two accepted plural forms, indexes and indices. The use of the plural form indices, pronounced [ˈɪndɪsɪz], is largely restricted to mathematics, economics, and technical contexts.

• For other senses of index, especially that of 'alphabetical list', the plural form indexes is preferred by most users: • This cookery book has two indexes: one lists recipes by name; the other lists principal ingredients. • Book titles and authors' names are entered in separate indexes.

Indian The adjective and noun Indian may refer to India and its inhabitants or to the indigenous peoples of America: • the Indian Empire • an Indian reservation.

• This common confusion can be blamed on the explorer Christopher Columbus, who mistook the New World for India.

The term American Indian is sometimes used to distinguish these peoples from the Indians of Asia; it is preferred to the older British term Red Indian, which refers to the Indians of North America, and is now generally considered offensive. It has, however, been largely replaced in its own turn by NATIVE AMERICAN.

An inhabitant of Pakistan, part of the Indian subcontinent, is a Pakistani. Asian Indians and Pakistanis living in Britain are usually referred to as Asians. Note that the Indian subcontinent itself is today more likely to be referred to as South Asia.

See also ASIAN or ASIATIC?

Further confusion may be caused by the term West Indian, which refers to inhabitants of the West Indies and their descendants.
indicate  In the field of medicine the verb indicate can mean 'require; show the need for or advisability of', usually in the passive:

• A course of antibiotics was indicated. Some people object to the use of indicated in this sense in nonmedical contexts, in place of shown to be necessary, advisable, etc.: • Redundancies were indicated. • Upgrading of the computer system is indicated.

indices  see INDEXES or INDICES?

indict or indite? The words indict and indite are both pronounced [in'dikt], but they have different meanings. Indict – note the c that is not pronounced – means 'accuse; formally charge'; indite is an older word that means 'write down'.

• The derived nouns are spelt indictment and inditement.

indifferent  The adjective indifferent should be followed by to or as to, not for or about: • He is indifferent to your criticism.

• I am indifferent as to the outcome of the trial.

• The two principal senses of indifferent have undergone a gradual change, from 'impartial' to 'unconcerned' or 'uninterested' and from 'neither good nor bad' to 'below average' or 'poor'. Used in either of its original senses, or even in one of its modern senses, the word is sometimes open to misinterpretation or confusion: • an indifferent referee may be impartial, uninterested, neither good nor bad, or poor.

indigenous  see NATIVE.

indignant  The adjective indignant is followed by the preposition at or about in the sense 'indignant at something': • He was indignant at [or about] having to do the washing up. In the sense 'indignant with a person', it is followed by with: • She seemed indignant with me.

indirect speech  see REPORTED SPEECH.

indiscriminate or undiscriminating?  Both adjectives refer to a lack of discrimination (in the sense of 'discernment' rather than 'prejudice'); indiscriminate has the extended meaning of 'random' or 'unselective'; • indiscriminate killings; • an undiscriminating palate.

• There is a tendency for undiscriminating to be preferred to indiscriminate with direct reference to people: • undiscriminating viewers • indiscriminate viewing.

See also DISCRIMINATING or DISCRIMINATORY?

indispensable This word, meaning 'absolutely essential': • In this job, a car and a telephone are indispensable assets, is sometimes misspelt.

• The ending is -able, and not -ible as in indestructible.

indite  see INDICT or INDITE?

individual  The use of the noun individual in place of person is disliked by some users, who reserve individual for contexts in which a single person is contrasted with a group: • the right of the individual • the person [not individual] who wrote this article.

• The noun individual is also used, with a derogatory, contemptuous, or humorous effect, to denote a particular kind of person: • an unpleasant individual • an eccentric individual. This usage is best restricted to informal contexts.

indoor or indoors?  Indoor is an adjective; indoors is a noun: • an indoor aerial • to go indoors • Indoor games are played indoors.

industrial or industrious?  These two adjectives should not be confused. Industrial is derived from the noun industry in the sense of 'manufacturing or commercial enterprises'; industrious means 'hard-working' (from industry in the sense of 'diligence; assiduity'): • an industrial town • an industrious student.

industrial action  The term industrial action may denote any of a number of measures (such as a strike, sit-in, go-slow, work-to-rule, or overtime ban) used by protesting or dissatisfied employees to put pressure on their employers: • Industrial action by electricity workers may result in power cuts. The term is, however, misleading and contradictory, as a strike is characterized by a lack of action, rather than action.

• The expression industrial action, which originated in the early 1970s, is not confined to industry (in the sense of 'manufacturing or commercial enterprises'); civil servants, teachers, hospital staff, etc., may take industrial action.

industrious  see INDUSTRIAL or INDUSTRIOUS?

inedible  see EATABLE or EDIBLE?

ineffective, ineffectual, inefficient  see EFFECTIVE, EFFECTUAL, EFFICACIOUS or EFFICIENT?

inept  see INAPT or INEPT?
inequality

inequality, inequity or iniquity? Inequality is the state of being unequal or different; inequity means 'unfairness'; iniquity is wickedness: • the inequality of their age • the inequity of the law • a den of iniquity. Inequality and inequity are much more formal words than inequality.
• All three nouns may be used in the sense of 'injustice', with different connotations: • The inequality of the tax system means that some people pay more tax than others; • The inequity of the tax system implies that the system is unfair; • The inequity of the tax system suggests that the system is morally wrong.

in extremis The Latin phrase in extremis is used in formal contexts to refer to an emergency or a very serious situation in which extreme methods must be taken: • The use of these drugs is only permitted in extremis.
• In other, especially religious, contexts, the phrase in extremis also means 'at the point of death': • (to administer) a rite only when the patient is in extremis. The phrase is sometimes written or printed in italics.

in fact The phrase in fact is largely used for emphasis or to expand on a previous statement: • This legislation will not in fact improve housing conditions in inner-city areas. • I'm not familiar with the machine, in fact I've only used it once.
• Since in fact means 'actually' or 'in reality', the addition of actually is considered by many users to be superfluous: • He often spends his holidays in France, but in actual fact he hates the French.

Note that it is incorrect to write the phrase as a single word, infact.

infamous or notorious? Both adjectives mean 'well-known for something bad': notorious emphasizes the well-known aspect; infamous emphasizes the bad aspect: • the execution of this infamous/notorious criminal • his notorious lack of punctuality • That junction is notorious for accidents. • one of Richard III's most infamous deeds.
• Note the pronunciation and stress pattern of infamous [infaməs], which is quite different from that of famous [fæməs].

infectious see contagious or infectious?

infer, inference see imply or infer?
inferior The adjective inferior is followed by the preposition to: • This novel is inferior to his last one.

infinite or infinitesimal? Infinite means 'having no limits' or 'extremely great': infinitesimal means 'negligible' or 'extremely small': • She has infinite patience. • The difference is infinitesimal. An infinite amount is so great that it cannot be measured; an infinitesimal amount is so small that it cannot be measured.

infinite The infinitive of a verb, often preceded by to, is its basic form, without any of the changes or additions that relate to tense, person, number, etc.: (to) go is the infinitive of the verb from which the past participle gone is derived.
• The infinitive is used without to after a number of auxiliary verbs: • you can leave • they must wait • he may object • we should succeed, etc.

After a number of other verbs, the infinitive is used with to: • I hope to see it. • She refused to come. • It never fails to amuse him. • Do you wish to go home? The infinitive (with to) is also used after adjectives and nouns: • easy to mend • a book to read.

In some constructions the infinitive functions as a verbal noun and may be interchangeable with its gerund (see ING FORMS): • We love walking/to walk. • He began writing/to write. • To teach teaching young children requires great patience. • To find finding another job is not always easy.

In other constructions the infinitive and gerund are not interchangeable: • able to win • capable of winning • a tendency to cheat • a habit of cheating • He volunteered to help • he considered helping.

Replacing an infinitive with a gerund sometimes changes the meaning of a sentence: • He stopped (i.e. paused) to read the notice. • He stopped reading the notice (i.e. He finished reading it). • I remembered to lock the door (i.e. I didn't forget to do it). • I remembered locking the door (i.e. I recalled having locked it).

See also SPLIT INFINITIVE.

For irregular parts of verbs see table at VERBS.

inflammable The adjective inflammable describes something that will catch fire and burn easily: • This liquid is highly inflammable. Inflammable may be wrongly interpreted as the opposite of its synonym flammable (by analogy with sensitive—insensitive; visible—invisible; edible—inedible; capable—incapable; etc.). The potential danger of such confusion has led to a preference, especially on warning signs and labels, for the less ambiguous terms flammable (denoting an inflammable substance) and non-
flammable (denoting a substance that is not (in)flammable).

- Inflammable also means 'easily angered or excited'; an inflammable situation, in this figurative sense it cannot be replaced by flammable.

The adjectives inflammable and inflammatory should not be confused: something inflammatory tends to arouse strong or violent feelings; an inflammatory speech.

inflation Inflation is a general increase in the level of prices: The rate of inflation has risen to 6%. The word is widely used, especially in informal contexts, to denote the rate of inflation: Inflation has risen to 6%.

- Inflation is sometimes misinterpreted as being synonymous with the level of prices: They say inflation's going down, but my money isn't going any further than it did. A fall in (the rate of) inflation does not mean a fall in prices; it simply denotes a slower increase.

inflection Inflection is the term used for the change in form that words undergo in order to denote distinctions of number, tense, gender, case, etc. It is also used to describe the grammatical relation of a word to its root by inflection. See DERIVED WORDS.

- Some can say that the word 'inflect' is formed by inflection from 'table'; 'walked' is formed by inflection from 'walk'; 'heron' is formed by inflection from 'here'; 'then' is formed by inflection from 'they'.

The spelling inflection is occasionally seen in British English. This is not incorrect. It is now considered virtually obsolete and inflection is the preferred spelling.

inflict see AFFECT or INFECT?

influenza see FLU.

info Some people dislike the increasing use of info-, short for information, to form new blends and compounds, especially in informal contexts: infotainment (informative entertainment) *infomania (preoccupation with information for its own sake) *infotech (information technology).

- The noun info 'information' should be used only in informal contexts.

inform The verb inform is best avoided where tell would be adequate or more appropriate: Please tell [not inform] your husband that his car is ready for collection.

- Unlike tell, inform should not be followed by an infinitive: They told [not informed] him to leave.

- They informed me of his departure.

inform is also used in the sense of 'inspire', which is closer to the meaning of the Latin verb informare 'give shape to', from which it is derived:

- His learning informs his whole discourse.

informant or informer? An informant is a person who gives information; an informer is a person who gives the police information about criminals and their activities:

The professor was one of the author's most useful informants.

- The police were tipped off about the robbery by an informer.

- The noun informer may also be used in the neutral sense of informant, but to avoid misunderstanding it is best restricted to its more specific meaning.

information The noun information is followed by the preposition on or about: Do you have any information on [or about] the company?

infringe see IMPRINT OR INFRINGE?

ingenious or ingenuous? Ingenious means 'clever' or 'inventive'; ingenuous means 'innocent', 'naive', or 'frank': an ingenious idea an ingenuous smile. The two adjectives are not interchangeable, but are sometimes confused.

- The noun ingenuity, originally derived from ingenuous and formerly used for both adjectives, is now restricted to the sense of 'cleverness' or 'inventiveness'; ingenuousness is the noun form of ingenuous.

- Note the pronunciations of the two adjectives: the e of ingenuous is long, as in mean; the e of ingenuous is short, as in men.

-ing forms The -ing form of a verb may be a present participle or a gerund (verbal noun): I am learning Japanese [present participle]. Learning Japanese is not easy [gerund]. It is sometimes difficult, and often unnecessary, to distinguish between a gerund and a present participle.

- Problems of usage arise when the gerund has its own subject: She disapproves of your using the car. She disapproves of the house where she spent her childhood being demolished. According to grammatical convention, the possessive form should always be used in such cases. The substitution of you for your in the first example (or of me/meus/their for me/meus/their in similar cases) would be unacceptable to many users, even in informal contexts. However, the substitution of childhood's for childhood in the second example would be clumsy, unidiomatic, and also unacceptable to many users.
Between these two extremes—the simple personal pronoun and the complex noun phrase—the possessive form is used with varying degrees of acceptability.

For personal names and nouns relating to people, animals, etc., the possessive form is usually preferred in formal contexts but is sometimes rejected in informal contexts: • She disapproves of Peter's using the car. • She disapproves of the gardener's using the car. If more than one name or noun is involved, the possessive form is usually rejected in all contexts: • She disapproves of Michael and Peter using the car. • She disapproves of the cook and the gardener using the car.

For abstract nouns and nouns relating to inanimate objects, which are rarely used with the possessive ending—'s, the possessive form is usually rejected: • She disapproves of the house being demolished. • She disapproves of religion being taught in schools.

In the four preceding examples, the absence of the possessive ending may cause confusion: the reader or listener is momentarily led to believe that she disapproves of Michael the cook, the house religion. Such confusion can often be avoided by restructuring the sentence or by replacing the gerund with a noun: • She disapproves of the demolition of the house.

The use of the possessive form with such words as painting, writing, meeting, cooking, etc., which may denote either an action or its result, can be ambiguous in some contexts: • We were not informed of their meeting (that they intended to hold a meeting). • We were not informed of their meeting (that they had met).

In other contexts, the use of the possessive form may alter the meaning of a sentence: • They watched the girl dancing places the emphasis on the girl; • They watched the girl's dancing places the emphasis on the dancing.

See also APOSTROPHE; DANGUS PARTICLES; INFINITIVE PARTICLES; 'S or 'S'; WANT.

inherent This word, meaning 'essential or intrinsic', has two possible pronunciations: [inhirənt] or [inhirənt]. The first of these is the more traditional and is preferred by many users.

inheritance see INHERITANCE or INHERITANCE?

inhuman or inhumane? Careful users maintain the distinction between inhuman and inhumane. Inhumane, the opposite of humane, means 'lacking in compassion and kindness; cruel; not merciful': • inhumane treatment. Inhuman, the opposite of human, is stronger and has a wider scope than inhumane. To be inhuman means to lack all human qualities, not only compassion and kindness: • inhuman violence • inhuman living conditions.

• Inhuman has the additional meaning of 'not having human form': • An inhuman shape appeared at the window.

iniquity see INEQUALITY, INEQUITY or INQUITY?

in-law The use of the plural noun in-laws, denoting a person's relatives by marriage, is best restricted to informal contexts: • My in-laws are coming for dinner on Saturday.

• The plural of mother-in-law, father-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, etc., is formed by adding s to the first element of the compound: mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, etc.

in lieu The phrase in lieu (of) is best avoided where instead (of) would be adequate or more appropriate: • She drove to the airport instead [not in lieu] of taking the train.

• In lieu (of) is chiefly used in formal contexts with reference to the replacement of one thing with another or others of equivalent value or importance: • If they have to work on Christmas Day they should be given time off in lieu. • We are sending two bottles of dessert wine in lieu of the champagne you ordered.

The word lieu may be pronounced [lew] or [lo].

in loco parentis The Latin phrase in loco parentis is used in formal contexts to mean 'acting for a parent; having the responsibilities of a parent': • On a school trip, teachers act in loco parentis.

• The phrase is pronounced [in loh-koh parentis]. It is sometimes written or printed in italics.

innit This is a contraction of isn't it, usually employed as a tag question (see QUESTIONS) at the end of a statement: • This is a nice place, innit? Originally used in working-class speech, innit? was taken up by black British speakers in the early 1980s as an all-purpose question tag and imitated in turn by young white speakers: • They're coming to the party, innit? Innit is a strictly non-standard slang usage and should always be avoided in formal contexts.

innocuous The adjective innocuous, meaning 'harmless': • a few innocuous remarks, is
sometimes misspelt. Note the -nn-, the single c, and the vowel sequence -oun-

**innovative** Many people dislike the frequent use of innovative in place of new, creative, imaginative, progressive, etc.: an innovative method of contraception an innovative sales manager an innovative company.

**inoculate** or **vaccinate**? The verbs inoculate and vaccinate are virtually synonymous in the sense of 'introduce a vaccine into the body of a person or animal to provide immunity': She has been inoculated [or vaccinated] against whooping cough. Inoculate has a wider range of usage: it may refer to the introduction of a substance other than a vaccine and is also used in figurative contexts in the sense of 'instil': He inoculated his students with egalitarian ideals.

Note the spelling of vaccinate, particularly the -cc- and the single n.

**inoculation** This word is often misspelt, the most frequent error being the addition of an extra n as in innocent. Note the single c and the single l.

**in order that** and **in order to** The phrase in order that is followed by may, might, shall, or should rather than can, could, will, or would: He moved his suitcase in order that we might [not could] open the door. She drove him to the station in order that he should [not would] not miss his train.

These restrictions do not apply to the simpler expression so that (see 50), which is often preferable to in order that in such contexts.

If the subordinate clause has the same subject as the main clause, in order that may be replaced by in order to followed by an infinitive: He moved his suitcase in order to open the door.

The phrase in order to is best avoided where to would be adequate: He turned the key to [not in order to] open the door.

**input** Many people object to the use of the noun input as a synonym for 'contribution': We hope to have some input from the teaching staff at tomorrow's meeting. positive input approval or encouragement negative input criticism.

As a noun, input may be used to denote the power, energy, data, etc., put into a system or machine, or the resources, labour, raw materials, etc., required for production.

The verb input refers to the process of entering data into a computer: Travel agents will be able to input data directly to a central computer. In other contexts, use of the verb input is generally deprecated, other verbs being preferred: contribute [not input] ideas to a meeting provide with [not input] equipment.

**inquiry** see **enquiry** or **inquiry**?

**inside** Of Many people dislike the prepositional phrase inside of, meaning 'within' or 'in less than', in which the word of is incorrect. The phrase should not be used in formal contexts: There was a cheque inside [not inside of] the envelope. The job was completed inside [not inside of] two weeks.

The addition of this superfluous of to the preposition inside may be influenced by the phrase on the inside, which is followed by of when it is used prepositionally: a coupon on the inside of the wrapper.

**inssofar as** This expression may be written in so far as or inssofar as, the latter being more frequent in American English: I'll help you in so far as it is appropriate.

See also **inasmuch as**.

**in spite of** see **despite** or **in spite of**?

**install** or **instal**? Both spellings of this word are correct, although the first is more frequently used: install a central-heating system.

If the spelling instal with a single l is chosen, then this doubles before the suffixes beginning with a vowel: installing, installed, installer, installation.

In British English, instalment has a single l, in American English it usually has a double l.

**instantly** or **instantaneously**? The adverbs instantly and instantaneously are virtually interchangeable in the sense of 'immediately' or 'without delay': He replied instantly/instantaneously.

Instantaneously has the additional meaning of 'very quickly' or 'almost simultaneously': She was hit by the car and died instantly.

**instil** This word, meaning 'introduce gradually', is often misspelt. It ends in a single l in British English.

* It is worth remembering that the l must be doubled before a suffix is added: instilled.

See also **spelling** 1.

**institute** or **institution**? Both nouns are used to denote certain professional bodies
and established organizations founded for research, study, charitable work, the promotion of a cause, etc.: • the Institute of Materials • the British Standards Institution • the Royal National Institute for the Blind • the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. The nouns also denote the buildings or premises used by these organizations.

- Institution has a range of additional meanings: 'the act of instituting'; • the institution of a new electoral system; 'an established social custom or practice'; • the institution of marriage; 'a school or hospital'; • an educational institution.

The verb institute means 'establish', 'initiate', or 'install'.

**instructional or instructive?** Instructional is the rarer word and means 'providing instruction(s)'; instructive is used in the wider sense of 'informative; enlightening': • an instructional leaflet • an instructive experience.

- Both adjectives may sometimes be applied to the same noun: • an instructional course is intended to instruct and may succeed or fail in this objective; • an instructive course succeeds in instructing, whether or not this was the intention.

**insulate** The verb insulate is followed by the preposition from or against: • The cupboard next to the cooker is insulated from [or against] the heat of the oven.

**insults** Note that the power of an insult depends largely upon the context in which it is uttered and the company to whom it is delivered. Many insults, for example ones that refer to a person’s ethnic origins or sexual orientation, may be considered highly offensive when delivered by a person from a different background, but innocuous enough when exchanged between members of the same group, and may even be intended as an inclusive term of affection. Examples include such taboo slang terms as bugger, nigger (used by some black people among themselves), and queer (used by some gays among themselves).

**insurance** see Assurance or Insurancen

**insure** see Assure, Ensure or Insure

**integral** Some people object to the frequent use of the phrase integral part, in which the adjective integral is often superfluous: • The study of local history is an integral part of the syllabus. Most parts are integral, i.e. ‘essential to the completeness of the whole’, by definition.

- In many contexts the word integral would be better replaced by essential, important, etc.: • Cash registers have become an integral part of even the most backward industries in these competitive days.

The usual pronunciation of integral is [ɪnˈtɪgrəl], stressed on the first syllable; the variant pronunciation [ɪnˈtɪɡrəl], stressed on the second syllable, is disliked by many users.

**integrate** The verb integrate is widely used in the sense of ‘make or become part of a social group’: • One of the aims of our organization is to integrate ethnic minorities into the community. • Newcomers to the village often find it difficult to integrate.

- In other contexts integrate is often better replaced by mix, amalgamate, join, combine, etc.: • a new television programme that combines [not integrates] learning with entertainment.

Note the spelling of integrate, which does not begin with the prefix inter.

**intense or intensive?** Intense means ‘extreme’ or ‘very strong’; intensive means ‘concentrated’ or ‘thorough’: • intense pain • intense heat • intensive training • an intensive search. The two adjectives are not interchangeable, although both may be applied to the same noun: intensive/intensive study.

- Both adjectives have additional senses: intense describes a person who has very strong and deep feelings; intensive has specialized meanings in grammar and agriculture and is used in such compounds as intensive care and labour-intensive.

**inter** see INTERMENT or INTERMENTED

**inter- or intra-?** The prefix inter- means ‘between’ or ‘reciprocally’; intra- means ‘within’: • intercontinental • interdependent • intravenous • intramural.

- The two prefixes should not be confused: international means ‘of two or more nations’; intranational means ‘within one nation’.

The prefix intra- is most frequently found in medical contexts: • intracranial • intramuscular • intradermal.

**interactive** In computing, the adjective interactive refers to direct communication between the user and the computer: • The disks are interactive, which means that they pose questions on the screen, and you only get
further information by answering (Daily Telegraph). The term is also applied to television programmes, video games, etc., in which the viewer or player is physically involved in the progress or completion of the programme, game, etc.

**intercede** This verb, meaning 'mediate', is sometimes misspelt. Note the -cede ending, as in concede, precede, etc. (unlike proceed, succeed, etc.).

**interface** In science, computing, etc., the noun interface denotes a surface forming a common boundary or a point of communication. Its extended use as a synonym for 'interaction', 'liaison', 'link', 'point of contact', etc., is disliked by many people: • the interface between professionals and lay people in the caring professions • the interface of history and literature • at the interface between design and technology.

> The verb interface is also best restricted to technical contexts: • The office microcomputers will interface with the main computer.

**interfere** The verb interfere is followed by the preposition 'with' in the sense 'meddle': • Don't interfere with my paper. It is followed by the preposition 'in' in the sense 'intrude': • The police are reluctant to interfere in a domestic dispute.

**interjections** see EXCLAMATIONS.

**interment** or **internment**? Interment means 'burial'; internment means 'imprisonment': • the internment of the corpse • the internment of the terrorists.

> The two words should not be confused.

The noun internment and the verb intern (from which it is derived) are formal words that refer to the depositing of a dead body in the earth or in a tomb.

The noun internment is derived from the verb intern, which refers to the confinement of enemy aliens, prisoners of war, etc.

In both nouns and both verbs the stress falls on the second syllable.

The noun intern, stressed on the first syllable, is an American name for someone in the final stages of professional training, especially in medicine.

**internecine** The adjective internecine may refer to slaughter or carnage, mutual destruction, or conflict within a group: • an internecine battle • internecine warfare • an internecine dispute.

> The first of these, the original meaning of the word, is the least frequent of the three; it is no longer listed in some dictionaries.

In British English the word is pronounced [ɪntɪˈnɛsɪn]; the variant pronunciation [ɪntɪˈnɛsɪn] is regarded by some as an Americanism.

**Internet** The Internet, commonly abbreviated to the net, is a worldwide network of computer networks which, with its vast amount of information, as well as innumerable forums for discussion and entertainment sites, has been responsible for a communications revolution.

It is significant that the Internet was not set up as a commercial venture and has no central governing authority. This lack of central administration means that users of the new medium have felt free to develop their own styles of communication, unfettered by the rules of conventional grammar and spelling, etc., making extensive use of shorthand versions of words, symbols, and slang. With time, however, the Internet has adopted its own conventions and etiquette (or netiquette) and numerous manuals on using it recommend correct spelling and grammar.

See also CHAT; DOT.COM; E-MAIL; NETSPEAK; SMILEY; WEB.

**internment** see **INTERMENT** or **INTERNMENT**?

**interpersonal** The adjective interpersonal, meaning 'between people', is disliked by some people as a vague term and can often be replaced by a synonym, such as social, or by a simple paraphrase: • interpersonal skills are social skills; • in an interpersonal situation means 'with people'.

**interpretive** or **interpretative**? Either adjective may be used, but interpretative is the more frequent: • The appendix contains interpretative/interpretive notes on the text.

**intestinal** The adjective intestinal is usually stressed on the third syllable, [ɪntɪˈstɪnəl]. The variant pronunciation [ɪntɪˈstɪnəl], with the stress on the second syllable, is also heard.

**in that** The phrase in that means 'because' or 'to the extent that': • He is unsuitable for the job in that he has no relevant experience. • The two machines are different in that one is fully automatic and the other is manually controlled.
in the fast lane

* In some contexts, however, in that may be better replaced by because or one of its synonyms: • We are in financial difficulties because [not in that] my wife has recently been made redundant.

* in the fast lane, in the fast track see fast lane.

in the near future The phrase in the near future is disliked by some users as an unnecessarily wordy substitute for soon: • The electronics company is considering relocating to Swindon in the near future.

in this day and age The cliché in this day and age is best avoided where nowadays, today, now, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • In this day and age a good education is not a passport to a successful career.

into or in to? Into is a preposition with a variety of meanings; in to is a combination of the adverb in and the preposition or infinitive marker to: • I went into the house. • I went in to fetch a book. • I went in to tea. • It is important to recognize and maintain the distinction between these uses. As prepositions, into and in are occasionally interchangeable: • He put the letter into his pocket. Into usually suggests movement from the outside to the inside, whereas in suggests being or remaining inside. In many contexts the two prepositions are not interchangeable: • They sailed into the harbour at four o'clock. • They sailed in the harbour all afternoon.

intonation Intonation is a change in pitch that adds to the meaning of a spoken word, phrase, or sentence. It should not be confused with stress, which relates to loudness or emphasis, although the two are often used in combination. • In English intonation is most noticeable in questions, where the pitch of the voice tends to rise towards the end: • When did she arrive? • Saturday? The sentence • Jane doesn’t want a cat, spoken with rising intonation, means ‘Does Jane want a cat?’ with falling intonation it is a neutral statement of fact. Other variations in the intonation of the sentence and the stress on individual words may produce a number of alternative interpretations, such as ‘I don’t believe that Jane wants a cat’, ‘Jane would like a pet of some sort, but not a cat’, and ‘Other people want a cat, but not Jane’.

Rising intonation is also heard in lists; falling intonation indicates the end of the list: • You can have carrots, peas, cabbage, or cauliflower.

in toto The Latin phrase in toto means ‘entirely’ or ‘completely’: • He did not disagree in toto.

* It is acceptable, but not necessary, to use italics when writing or printing this expression.

intra- see inter- or intra-. 

intransitive see verbs.

intrinsic or extrinsic? The adjective intrinsic means ‘inherent’, ‘essential’, or ‘originating from within’: • The discovery is of great intrinsic interest. Extrinsic, the opposite of intrinsic, is less frequent in general usage: • The document is of extrinsic interest only.

* The intrinsic value of a pound coin, for example, is the value of the metal from which it is made; its extrinsic value is one pound.

introvert see extrovert or introvert.

Inuit The term Inuit refers to the people of North America and Greenland traditionally known as Eskimos. The term Inuit (meaning ‘people’) is preferred to Eskimo (meaning ‘eater of raw flesh’), by the Inuit themselves. It may also be used to distinguish this people from the Eskimos of the Aleutian Islands and Siberia. • Inuit, sometimes spelt Innuit, is pronounced [inoyt]. The plural is Inuitt or Inuits.

invalid The adjectival sense of ‘not valid’ is pronounced with the stress on the second syllable [invalid]. The noun sense of ‘someone who is ill’ is pronounced with the stress on the first syllable, either as [invalid] or [invaléed].

* The verb sense, ‘disable’ or (usually followed by out) ‘remove from active service because of illness or injury’, may be pronounced [invalid], [invaliéed], or [invaléed].

 inveigh or inveigle? To inveigh is to protest strongly; to inveigle is to persuade cleverly: • She inveighed against the inequity of the law. • He inveigled us into signing the form. Inveigh, an intransitive verb, is followed by against, whereas inveigle is transitive and often used with into.

* The two verbs are both formal and are sometimes confused. Note the ei spelling of both.

Inveigh is always pronounced [inveigh]; inveigle may be pronounced [inveiglé] or [inveeg].
invent, design or discover? Invent and design refer to the creation of something new; discover refers to the finding of something that is already in existence: • to invent a machine • to design a new computer • to discover a cure for cancer.

The three words sometimes overlap in usage. A scientific discovery may lead to an invention, and inventions have to be designed. Some people dislike the use of invent in place of design: a new type of car, for example, that is modelled on existing styles and uses a traditional method of propulsion, is designed, not invented.

inventory The noun inventory, unlike invent and invention, is stressed on the first syllable. The usual British pronunciation is [in'ventəri]; in American English the -o- may be sounded: [in'ventori].

inversely see CONVERSE, INVERSE, OBLIQUE or REVERSE?

inversion Inversion is a reversal of the normal order of the elements of a sentence or clause so that the subject follows the verb: • There goes the bus. • In came Michael.

At the bottom of the heap was the missing book.

Inversion is most frequently used in QUESTIONS:

• Am I late? It is also used after so, neither, and nor: • So are they. • Neither do we, and after some negative words and phrases: • Never have I heard such nonsense! • On no account should he go. The use of inversion in conditional clauses: • Had she known about his past, she would not have married him. • There’s a fire extinguisher here, should you need it, is rather more formal than the use of an if clause: • If she had known... • If you should need it.

Inversion is optional after direct speech, but is best avoided if the subject is a pronoun: • ‘Go away!’ cried the boy. • ‘Go away!’ he cried. In poems and stories inversion is sometimes used for effect or variety: • In a hole in the tree lived a wise old owl. • Stands the Church clock at ten to three? (Rupert Brooke).

inverted commas see QUOTATION MARKS.

invite The use of the word invite as a noun, in place of invitation, is disliked and avoided by many users, even in informal contexts: • Have you had an invite to their party? • Thank you for your invitation, which I am very pleased to accept.

Note that the stress pattern of the noun invite is different from that of the verb: the noun is stressed on the first syllable; the verb is stressed on the second syllable.

See also STRESS.

in vitro The Latin phrase in vitro is used to refer to a method of fertilizing a woman’s egg by artificial means outside the woman’s body.

The literal meaning of in vitro is ‘in glass’. It is sometimes written or printed in italics. It is pronounced [in ve'trō].

The abbreviation IVF stands for in vitro fertilization.

involve Some people object to the frequent use of the verb involve and its derivatives in place of more specific or more appropriate synonyms: • This proposal will entail [not involve] further cuts in expenditure. • Some changes may be necessary [not involved]. • I have a number of questions concerning [not involving] teaching methods and discipline. • These fingerprints are evidence of his participation [not involvement] in the robbery.

Many authorities recommend that involve and its derivatives be restricted to the sense of entanglement and complication: • the chairman’s involvement in the scandal • a long-winded and involved account of the incident.

inward or inwards? In British English inward is principally used as an adjective, inwards being the usual form of the adverb meaning ‘towards the inside’: • inward feelings • to push inwards.

The adverb inward is more frequently used in American English.

See also -WARD or -WARDS?

IQ This abbreviation for ‘intelligence quotient’: • The average IQ is one hundred, must always be written with capital letters. The abbreviation may be written with full stops, I.Q., but this form is becoming less frequent in modern usage (see ABBREVIATIONS).

The abbreviation with lower-case letters, i.q., stands for idem quod, a Latin phrase meaning ‘the same as’.

irascible The formal word irascible, meaning ‘easily angered’, is sometimes misspelt. Irascible has a single r and ends in -ible, unlike its synonym irritable. Note also the sc.

ironic, ironical, ironically see IRONY.
iron out The phrasal verb iron out is widely used in the metaphorical sense of 'settle', 'resolve', 'solve', or 'remove': • *We have a few more problems to iron out before work can begin.*

∙ It's best avoided, however, in contexts that may be associated with its literal meaning of 'smooth with an iron': • *The laundry workers have ironed out their difficulties.* • *The last stumbling block was ironed out at yesterday's meeting.*

irony *Irony is the use of words to express the opposite of their accepted meaning, often for satirical or humorous effect. Words such as *precios* and *fine* are often used ironically, as in: 'This is a fine time to tell me you've no keys!'*

∙ Some people object to the frequent use of the noun *irony* and its derivatives to refer to something paradoxical, incongruous, or odd: • *She resigned when they rejected her proposal; the irony of the situation is that they have now adopted the system she proposed.* • *It's ironic that he should win a skiing holiday just after breaking his leg.* • *Ironically, it was the police inspector's car that was stolen.*

The adjectives *ironic* and *ironical* are both in use, *ironic* being the more frequent.

Irony may be used as a form of sarcasm, but the two words should not be confused; an *ironic* remark is more witty and less cruel than a *sarcasmic* remark.

irrefutable This word, meaning 'impossible to be disproved': • *irrefutable evidence*, may be stressed on the second or on the third syllable: [əˈrɪrɪfʊtəbəl] or [əˌrɪrɪˈfʊtəbəl]. The second pronunciation is becoming more common.

irregardless The word *irregardless* is a nonstandard blend of *irr* egardless. Most dictionaries do not acknowledge its existence, but it is frequently heard in colloquial usage: • *Irregardless of what we say about Robbo, he done a good job,* was a near-miss by Elton Welsby for *ITV in Bologna* (*The Guardian*). The word should be avoided in all contexts; either *irreversible* or *irregardless* may be used in its place (see *irr* egardless).

irregular verbs For irregular parts of verbs see table at *verbs*.

irrelevant This word is frequently misspelt. Note the *-rr*- and the vowels *-e-* and *-a*.

irreparable This word, meaning 'unable to be repaired', is often mispronounced. The stress should fall on the second syllable and not the third [ɪˌrɪˈpærəbəl].

See also *repairable* or *repairable?*

irresistible Note the spelling of this adjective, particularly the *-rr-* and the *-ible* (not *-able*) ending.

irrespective The word *irrespective* is most frequently used in the prepositional phrase *irrespective of*, meaning 'regardless of': • *Applications are invited from all suitably qualified candidates; irrespective of age, sexual orientation, nationality, disability or religion.*

∙ The expression *irrespectively* is generally considered to be undiomatic.

Unlike *regardless*, *irrespective* should not be used adverbially in other contexts; if soon began to rain but they carried on with their game regardless [not *irrespectively*].

See also *irregardless*.

irrevocable In its general sense of 'not able to be changed': • *an irrevocable decision*, the word *irrevocable* is stressed on the second syllable, [ɪˌrɪvəˈkæbl]. The pronunciation [ɪˌrɪvəˈkæbl], stressed on the third syllable, is restricted to a few legal or financial contexts, where the sense is literally 'not able to be revoked': • *irrevocable letters of credit.*

**irrupt** see *erupt* or *irrupt?*

**is** Many people dislike the repetition of *is* in such constructions as *the question is, is there any future in this? and the problem is, is it going to work?* Careful speakers and writers use one *is* only, by rewording either part or avoid such constructions altogether: • *The question is whether there is any future in this or not.* • *We must ask ourselves, is there any future in this?*

**-ise** see *-ze* or *-se?*

**-ism** Some people object to the increasing use of the suffix *-ism*, in the sense of 'discrimination', to coin new words modelled on the nouns *racism* and *sexism*: • *legislation against ageism* • *the controversial issue of heterosexism* • *ableism* • *heightism*.

∙ The use of the suffix to form new nouns in the conventional sense of 'doctrine' or 'system' is acceptable in moderation: • *The Third Way* was one of the key ideas of *Blairism*.

**issue** Overuse of *issue* as a euphemistic substitute for words such as *problem* or
difficulty should be avoided: • They have relationship issues. • He has issues around his appearance.

-ist or -ite? Both these suffixes may be used to denote an adherent, follower, advocate, or supporter of a particular doctrine: • Stalinist • Luddite • communist • Blairite. The suffix -ite is sometimes used in a derogatory manner: people who call themselves Trotskyists, for example, may be described by opponents of Trotskyism as Trotskyite.

♦ The suffix -ism, which is also used to form adjectives, may face the same objection as -ism:
  ♦ ageist principles • heterosexist attitudes • classist ♦ genderist.

-ista The word ending -ista, probably modelled originally upon such Spanish words as Sandinista (a member of a left-wing organization in power in Nicaragua from 1979 to 1990), has appeared with increasing frequency in recent years in a variety of vogue terms: • fashionista. Such coinages are humorous and often slightly derogatory.

isthmus The noun isthmus, meaning ‘narrow strip of land’, causes problems of spelling and pronunciation. Note the four adjacent consonants -sthm-. The [th] sound is not heard in the usual pronunciation [is'məs]; the full pronunciation [isth'məs] is no more or less correct.

it The pronoun it has a wide range of uses:
• to replace an abstract noun or the name of an inanimate object, as the subject of an impersonal verb, etc.: • He washed the towel and hung it out to dry. • It hasn’t rained for a week. • I find it difficult to make new friends.
• It’s obvious that she doesn’t like him. For this reason, the use of it may sometimes cause ambiguity or confusion: • She took her purse out of her handbag and put it on the table [the purse or the handbag?]. • You can open the window if it gets too hot [the window or the weather].

♦ The constructions it is was . . . who and it is was . . . that should be used only for emphasis: • It was she who broke the window, so don’t see why you should pay for the repair. • It’s the weather that’s making me feel tired – I’m not ill.

In such constructions the verb agrees with the pronoun or noun that follows is or was, not with the word it: • It’s I who wish [not wishes] to complain. • It was they who were [not was] at fault. • It is the books that make [not makes] the trunk so heavy. (Note the use of I and they, rather than me and them; see also I or ME? PRONOUNS.)

The construction is not used with where or when: • It is in France that the best cheeses are to be found [not it is France where . . .]. • It was in 2001 that he won the championship [not it was 2001 when . . .].

However, the construction should not be confused with such statements as It was dark when we arrived and It’s snowing where my parents live or such expressions as It is believed that . . . and it is possible that . . .

See also ITS or IT’S? THAT or WHICH?

italics The word italic denotes a sloping typeface that is used for a variety of purposes in English. In handwritten or typeset text, italics are generally used to indicate italics.

♦ The principal uses of italics are:
1 For the titles of books, newspapers, magazines, plays, films, works of art, musical works, etc.: • The Economist • An Ideal Husband, by Oscar Wilde • Elgar’s Enigma Variations.
2 For the names of ships, boats, trains, aircraft, etc.: • Sir Francis Chichester sailed round the world in Gipsy Moth IV.
3 For the Latin names of plants, animals, etc.: • The tiger, Panthera tigris, is found in Asia.
4 For foreign words and phrases that are not fully integrated into the English language: • This was his pièce de résistance. • The teacher is in loco parentis. It is sometimes difficult to judge whether a foreign word or phrase should be italicized or not. Some dictionaries offer guidance on this matter.
5 To indicate stress or emphasis: • Is it still raining? • I don’t like spiders, but I’m not afraid of them. Excessive italicization for the purpose of stress or emphasis is avoided by careful users.
6 To draw attention to a particular word, phrase, or letter: • How do you pronounce controversy? • Her surname is spelt with a double s.

-ite see -IST or -ITE?

itinerary This word, meaning ‘planned
route of a journey, is sometimes misspelt.
The careful pronunciation [ɪtʃər] should ensure its correct spelling.

its or it's? It's, a contraction of it is or it has, should not be confused with its, the possessive form of it. • It's easy to tell the difference. • It's been raining for several hours. • The lion has escaped from its cage.

See also APOSTROPHE, CONTRACTIONS; 's or ?
• The insertion of an apostrophe in the possessive form is a wrong in all contexts, although it occasionally finds its way to print. • It's aim is to encourage new ideas and developments in the field of learning and teaching English (advertisement for The English-Speaking Union, The Guardian).

The omission of the apostrophe in the contraction it's is less frequent, but equally unacceptable.

IVF see IN VITRO.

-ize or -ise? In British English, the sound [ɪz] at the end of many verbs may be spelt -ise or -ize: • baptize/baptise • realize/realise • recognize/recognise • organize/organise; etc. Most modern dictionaries, partly because of the American international influence, list -ise as the preferred spelling, giving -ize as an accepted variant. Otherwise, -ise is generally as common as -ize in British English.

• There is etymological justification for both spellings, the suffix being derived via French -iser from Latin -izare and Greek -izein.

Whichever spelling is preferred, it is important to be consistent within a single piece of writing, both in the choice of other -ize/-ise words and in the spelling of any derivatives ending in -ization/-isation, -izer-iser, -izable/-izable, etc.

Gazise is the only -ize verb of more than one syllable that is never spelt -ise.

However, there are a number of -ise verbs that cannot be spelt -ize; the most common of these are advertise, advise, chastise, circumcise, compromise, compromise, deprise, devise, enfranchise, excise, exercise, franchise, improvise, merchandise, revise, supervise, surmise, surprise, and teleisure.

See also EXERCISE or EXORISE?

Verbs ending in -ise, such as analyse and paralyse, are never spelt -ize in British English.

In American English, -ise is always used for verbs that can have either ending in British English, but -ise is usually retained for verbs of the advertise... teleisure group. Analyse, paralyse, etc., are spelt with z in American English.

Some people object to the modern tendency to create new verbs by the addition of -ize/-ise to a noun or adjective: • pedestrianize • hospitalize • prioritize • finalize • weaponize. Such verbs are best avoided where a simpler form or synonym exists: to martyrize may be replaced with to martyr, to finalize can often be replaced with to finish. However, -ize/-ise verbs (and their derivatives) that have neither a one-word equivalent nor a simple paraphrase often serve a useful purpose: • to computerize the stock-control system • the decimalization of British currency.
jail or gaol? In British English these two spellings are both acceptable, although jail is preferred by many people. In American English jail is the only accepted spelling.

jargon Jargon is the technical language used within a particular subject or profession, such as science, computing, medicine, law, accountancy, etc.: • CVA or cerebral vascular accident is medical jargon for a stroke.

• The term is also used to denote the complex, obscure, pretentious or euphemistic language used by estate agents, journalists, sociologists, advertisers, bureaucrats, politicians, etc.: • In sociological jargon the class system has been replaced with a series of socioeconomic groups.

Jargon of both types is acceptable, and often indispensable, in professional journals and in written or spoken communications between members of the same group. It should be avoided, however, in articles, brochures, insurance policies, etc., that are to be read and understood by lay people and in conversations with members of the general public. Jargon should not be used to impress, intimidate, confound, or mislead the outsider.

See also COMMERCIALISE; JOURNALISE; OFFICIALISE.

Jargon sometimes finds its way into everyday language in the form of Clichés or vogue words, e.g. interface, traumatic, user-friendly. Such words and expressions are disliked and avoided by many users.

Jargon should not be confused with DIALECT or SLANG.

jealous The adjective jealous is followed by the preposition of: • He was jealous of her success.

jealousy see ENVY or JEALOUSY?

jeans see GENES or JEANS?

jeopardize This word, meaning 'expose to danger', is often misspelt, the most frequent error being the omission of the letter o.

• Note that the vowel pattern is the same as in leopard.

jewellery or jewelry? This word has two spellings in British English. Both are acceptable, although jewellery, standard in American English, is less frequent in British English.

• The preferred pronunciation is [jooəli] rather than the dialectal or nonstandard [jooli].

The spelling jeweller is more common in British English; jeweler in American English.

jibe see GIBE, JIBE OR GYBE?

jodhpurs This word, meaning 'riding trousers', is often misspelt; the h being either incorrectly placed or omitted completely.

• The word originates from Jodhpur, a city in India, hence the unusual spelling.

join or joint? The nouns join and joint are synonymous (but not interchangeable) in the sense of 'place where two parts are joined'. Join most frequently refers to the visual effect of the act of joining, the line or seam between two flat or flexible parts (such as paper, fabric, carpet, string, etc.): • You can hardly see the join. A joint is more practical or functional, joining two rigid three-dimensional parts: • The pipe was leaking at one of the joints. • the joint between the shaft and the head.

joined-up Joined-up is used in expressions such as joined-up thinking and joined-up policy to describe a logical coordinated approach to an issue: • What we need here is some joined-up thinking. It is presumably derived from joined-up writing, regarded as more sophisticated than the individual handwritten lettering of young children. Many people consider it a jargonistic term that is best restricted to informal contexts.

journalise Journalise is a derogatory name for the style of writing or language that is considered to be typical of newspapers.
judgment

- It is characterized by the use of clichés and short sensational synonyms, e.g., axe, bid, probe, which occur especially in headlines. The telegraphic style of newspaper headlines sometimes gives rise to ambiguity or confusion: • Merseyside pioneers abuse teaching pack for schools (The Guardian). This headline was intended to mean 'A teaching pack about child abuse has been launched on Merseyside', but it could be interpreted as 'Pioneers on Merseyside are missing a teaching pack'.

  Careful users avoid such techniques and devices in formal writing.

  See also JARGON.

judgment or judgement? Either spelling of this word is acceptable, although judgment was formerly more common in British English and judgment in American English.

- Whichever spelling of judge(ment) is adopted, it is advisable to be consistent in the spelling of this word and words such as abridge(ment) and acknowledge(ment).

judicial or judicious? Judicial means 'of judgment in a court of law' or 'of the administration of justice'; judicious means 'having or showing good judgment' or 'prudent': • judicial proceeding • a judicious choice.

- The two adjectives are not interchangeable, although both may be applied to the same noun: • a judicial decision is the decision of a court of law; • a judicious decision is a wise decision.

  Judicial may also mean 'of a judge; impartial; fair'; it is in this sense that it is most likely to be confused with judicious.

juncture The phrase at this juncture refers to a critical point in time; many people object to its frequent use in place of now: • The leader’s resignation at this juncture would have a disastrous effect on the members' morale. • I suggest that we take a short break for refreshments now [not at this juncture].

- The use of juncture has developed from its meaning of 'concurrency or conjunction of events or circumstances'. The noun is rarely used in its original sense, as a synonym of 'junction' or 'joint'.

junta This word refers to a controlling political council and has various pronunciations. The preferred pronunciation is [jun-ta].

- Other alternatives such as [huun-ta] and [juunt-a] have arisen in imitation of the Spanish pronunciation.

just /just has a variety of adverbial senses: 'at this moment', 'exactly', 'only', etc. For this reason it must be carefully positioned in a sentence in order to convey the intended meaning: • Your son has just eaten two cakes [i.e. a short time ago]. • Your son has just eaten two cakes [i.e. not one or three, etc.]. • Just your son has eaten two cakes [i.e. only your son; no one else]. Transposing just and not may also change the meaning of a sentence: • I’m just not tired. • I’m not just tired. I’m hungry too.

- In the sense of 'in the very recent past', just should be used with the perfect tense in formal contexts: • They have just arrived at the station. Its use with the past tense in this sense (They just arrived ...) is regarded as an Americanism and is avoided by many careful users, even in informal contexts.

  Just may be used in place of, but not in addition to, exactly: • That’s just [not just exactly] what I need.
The letter K, short for kilo-, is increasingly used to represent 1000, especially in sums of money: • a salary of £50K plus company car • houses priced from £250K upwards. The abbreviation is also used in spoken language: • She was earning a hundred K in the City.

This usage was adopted from the jargon of computing, where K may represent 1000 or 1024.

Kaleidoscope This word is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the -et and the first o from the Greek eidos, meaning 'form'.

The correct pronunciation is [kæliˈdɔskəp].

Karaoke The noun karaoke, denoting a form of entertainment in which people sing along with a pre-recorded tape, causes problems of spelling and pronunciation. Of Japanese origin, the word may be pronounced [karəˈkoɪ] or [karəˈkoʊ] in English.

Kerb see CURBS or KERB.

Key Some people object to the increasingly frequent use of the word key as an adjective, in the sense of 'fundamental', 'essential', 'crucial', 'most important', 'indispensable', etc.: • a number of key individuals to manage their top UK stores • setting up a policy committee that will take key decisions (Sunday Times).

In many contexts it is better replaced by one of its synonyms.

Kibbutzim Kibbutzim is the plural form of the noun kibbutz, denoting a collective community in Israel. Kibbutz is pronounced [ˈkɪbʊtʃ], rhyming with put; kibbutzim is stressed on the final syllable [kɪbʊtˈtʃim].

Kick-start The figurative use of the verb kick-start in the sense of 'take action to get in motion (again)' is becoming rather hackneyed, especially in the phrase kick-start the economy: • Plans to balance income tax cuts with measures to boost business and kick-start the economy will form a key element in the chancellor's strategy (Sunday Times). • to kick-start the housing market.

The metaphor is derived from the world of motocycling, where the verb refers to the act of starting an engine by kicking or pressing a pedal.

Kid The use of the noun kid as a synonym for 'child' or 'young person' is best restricted to informal contexts: • Things were very different when I was a kid. • One of the local kids broke the window. • Have you got any kids?

Kidnap The final p of the word kidnap is doubled before a suffix beginning with a vowel: • kidnapped • kidnapper.

See also SPELLING 1.

Kidult The noun kidult refers to an adult who continues to enjoy childish pursuits and tastes. In marketing terms it also describes consumer products and entertainment, including books, films, and TV programmes, that appeal to adults as well as children. The word, resulting from the combination of kid and adult, is a vogue term best restricted to informal contexts: • The surroundings appealed to the kidult in me.

See also ADULTESCENT.

Kilo The word kilo, pronounced [ˈkiːloʊ], is most frequently used as an abbreviation for kilogram: • a kilo of sugar • 50 kilos of coal.

Some dictionaries also list kilo as an abbreviation for kilometre, but this usage is very rare.

Note that the first syllable of the prefix kilo-, in such words as kilometre, kilogram, etc., is pronounced like the word kill, not keel.

Kilometre This word may be stressed on the first syllable [ˈkiːləmɛtər] or on the second syllable [ˈkɪləmɪtər].

The first of these pronunciations is the more widely accepted in British English. The second, regarded by some as an Americanism, is probably becoming more current in British English.
kindly

The word kindly may be used as an adjective, meaning 'kind' or 'sympathetic', or as an adverb, meaning 'in a kind way': • a kindly policeman • kindly smile. They treated us kindly.

The adjective kindly has no one-word adverbial form: • He smiled in a kindly manner.

The adverb kindly is also used in polite or angry requests or commands: • Patrons are kindly requested to refrain from smoking. • Kindly allow me to tell you what happened. • Would you kindly take your hand off my knee? In such contexts it is often better replaced by please.

kind of

In formal contexts the phrases kind of, sort of, and type of, in which kind, sort, and type are in the singular, should be preceded by this or that (rather than these or those) and followed by a singular noun: • this kind of story • that sort of biscuit.

Such expressions as these kind of stories, those sort of biscuits, etc., are sometimes heard in informal contexts but are disliked and avoided by careful users.

A plural noun may used if the expression is rephrased: • Stories of this kind are very popular. Note that the verb agrees with stories, not kind.

Where more than one kind, sort, or type is concerned, the whole expression may be put into the plural: • She specializes in detective stories and horror stories: these kinds of stories are very popular. In such cases, the noun that follows kinds/ sort/ types may remain in the singular. . . . these kinds of story are very popular. (Note that the verb here agrees with kinds, not story.)

The same principles apply to kind of, sort of, and type of in other contexts: • a different type of vegetable • many different types of vegetable/vegetables.

See also singular or plural?

The use of kind of or sort of in place of rather or somewhat is best restricted to formal contexts: • I sort of like him. • It's kind of warm in here. The shortening kinds is sometimes used in writing to denote 'kind of' in casual speech.

kinsman or kinswoman?

See non-sexist terms.

knee-jerk

In figurative contexts, the term knee-jerk is applied to an automatic, predictable, and/or unthinking reaction, as opposed to a more considered response: • A knee-jerk reaction to the problem could make matters worse. • Industrial action is the knee-jerk response of many union leaders. The term should be confined to informal usage and not be overused.

A knee-jerk reaction or response is the metaphorical equivalent of the physical reflex action that results from a light blow just below the kneecap.

kneel or knelt?

Either word may be used as the past tense and past participle of the verb kneel. Kneel is more frequent in British English: • He knelt on the grass; knelt in American English.

See also -ed or -d?

knight or night?

The word knight variously describes an armoured medieval warrior or a romantic hero. It should not be confused with night, as in day and night, although both words are pronounced the same [nait].

knit or knitted?

Knitted is the more frequent form of the past tense and past participle of the verb knit, especially in the literal sense: • I (have) knitted a cardigan for the baby. • She was wearing a knitted jacket.

Knit, an alternative form of the past tense and past participle, is largely restricted to figurative contexts, especially in combination with an adverb before a noun: • a closely knit family • a well-knit athlete.

knock-on effect

The phrase knock-on effect refers to a series of related causes and effects: • The reduction in taxes will have a knock-on effect throughout the economy.

knot or not?

Knot means 'fastening' or 'tangled mass of hair or thread, etc.': • She tied a knot in the cord. It should not be confused with not, both words being pronounced [not].

know

See you know.

knowledgeable

This word, meaning 'having clear knowledge or understanding', is sometimes misused. Note that the final -e of knowledge is retained before the suffix -able.

kudos

This word, from Greek, is approximately equivalent to 'prestige' or 'status'. Some people avoid using it on the grounds that it sounds pretentious, although this reservation has become less pronounced over the years as the word has gradually become more widely familiar.
laboratory The usual pronunciation of this word in British English is [ləˈbɒrəterɪ], with the stress on the second syllable; the second o is sometimes not sounded. In American English the stress falls on the first and fourth syllables, [ləˈbɔːrətɔrɪ]; the first o is sometimes not sounded.
laborious The word laborious is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent error being the insertion of a u after the first o, as in labour.
lack When using the verb lack, lack for in place of lack is unacceptable to many people, and the superfluous for is best omitted: • She did not lack [not lack for] friends.
• The use of lack for may be influenced by the synonymous phrase want for, in which the optional preposition serves the useful purpose of avoiding ambiguity or confusion with want in the sense of 'desire': • She did not want for friends.
lacquer This word is sometimes misspelt. Note that it has only one -u-: the word ends in -er, and not -eur as in liqueur.
laden or loaded? Laden, a past participle of the verb laden, is principally used as an adjective, meaning 'weighed down' or 'burdened'; loaded is the past tense and past participle of the verb load: • The tree was laden with apples. • We overtook a heavily laden lorry. • He (has) loaded the car. The verb laden, meaning 'load with cargo', is rarely used in modern times in any other form, except in the term bill of lading.
• Loaded is also used as an adjective in literal and figurative senses: • a loaded gun • a loaded question, 'one that contains hidden implications or is misleading'.

The two adjectives should not be confused: • The van is laden with furniture implies that the van is weighed down or full to overflowing with furniture; • The van is loaded with furniture simply means that the van contains furniture.
lady see WOMAN.
laid, lain see LAY or lay.
last To avoid ambiguity, the adjective last should be replaced, where necessary, with an appropriate synonym, such as latest, final, or preceding: • His latest [not last] novel was published in June. • His final [not last] novel was published in June. • The final [not last] chapter contains a list of useful addresses. • The preceding [not last] chapter contains a list of useful addresses.

- The use of last may also cause confusion in such phrases as last Wednesday, used on a Friday, which may mean ‘two days ago’ or ‘nine days ago’. If the context is clear in the past, last may be replaced by on before days of the current week: • I posted it on [not last] Wednesday.

Sec also NEXT or THIS?

Last may be retained where the context makes its meaning clear: • His last novel was published posthumously. • The identity of the narrator is not revealed until the last chapter.

late Used directly before a noun denoting a person, the adjective late may mean ‘dead’ or ‘former’: • The widow gave her late husband’s clothes to charity. • The late president has written his memoirs. To avoid confusion, late (in the sense of ‘former’) is often better replaced by ex- or former: • the ex-chairman • my former flatmate.

- It is generally unnecessary to add late to a person’s name in obituaries, death announcements, or in historical contexts.

lath or lathe? These two nouns should not be confused. A lath is a thin strip of wood; a lathe is a machine for shaping wood, metal, etc. Note that it is the noun lath, not lathe, that is used in the simile as thin as a lath.

- Lath is pronounced [læθ]; lathe is pronounced [laθ].

later This word has various pronunciations. The traditional pronunciation rhymes with gather, but the pronunciation rhyming with father is becoming more frequent in contemporary usage.

- The pronunciation [læθər] is incorrect.

latter see FORMER and LATTER.

launch The verb launch is widely used in the figurative sense of ‘set in motion’, ‘start’, or ‘introduce’: • The campaign will be launched next month • They have just launched their new perfume.

- Launch is also used figuratively as a noun: • He gave a party to celebrate the launch of his latest novel.

Some people object to the frequency of this usage, replacing launch with an appropriate synonym wherever possible.

lava see LARVA or LAVA?

lavatory see TOILET, LOO or BATHROOM?

law and order Careful speakers pronounce this phrase without an intrusive [s] sound between the words law and and. Similar care should be taken with the pronunciation of other words and phrases containing the sound [aw] followed by a vowel, such as drawing, awe-inspiring. I saw it.

lawful, legal or legitimate? All these adjectives mean ‘authorized by law’, but there are differences of sense, usage, and application between them: • the lawful owner • a legal contract • a legitimate organisation.

- Lawful means ‘allowed by law’ or ‘rightful’; it is largely restricted to formal contexts or set phrases, such as one’s lawful business.

- Legal is more widely used, having the additional meaning of ‘relating to law’: • the legal profession • legal advice • the legal system • legal action.

- The adjectival legitimate is principally applied to children born in wedlock; • the King’s legitimate son; it also means ‘reasonable’, ‘logical’, ‘genuine’, or ‘valid’: • a legitimate excuse • a legitimate reason.

lay or lie? The verb lay, which is usually transitive – i.e. has an object – is often confused with lie, which is intransitive, i.e. does not have an object: • I’ll lay the towel on the sand to dry. • She’s going to lie down for a while.

- Careful users maintain the distinction between the two verbs in all contexts.

This confusion is probably due to the fact that the word lay also serves as the past tense of lie. • The baby lay in his cot and screamed. • You’d better lay the baby in his cot. • The past participle of lie is lain; the word laid (note the spelling) is the past tense and past participle of lay. • They have lain in the sun for too long. • We [have] laid our coats on the bed.

This verb lie, meaning ‘rest in a horizontal position’, should not be confused with the unrelated verb lie, meaning ‘be untruthful’. The past tense and past participle of the latter are regular: • He [had] lied about his age. The present participle of both these verbs is lying; the present participle of the verb lay is laying.
The verb lay has a number of specific uses: • to lay eggs • to lay the table • to lay a ghost; etc. The expression to lay low, meaning 'to bring down', should not be confused with to lie low, meaning 'to stay in hiding'.

The verb lay is rarely used without a direct object, a notable exception being the sense of 'produce eggs'. • If the hens don't lay there will be no eggs for breakfast. The verb lie never has a direct object.

See also OVERLAY OR OVERLay?; UNDERLAY or UNDERlie?

layman or laywoman? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

LDC see DEVELOPMENT.

leach or leech? These two words are occasionally confused since they are pronounced in the same way. The verb leach means 'deprive of something' or 'drain away': The colour leached from his face. It should not be confused with the noun leech, which describes a bloodsucking freshwater worm: • She picked a leech off her leg.

lead or led? These two words are often confused. Lead means 'guide by going in front': • He was leading the walking party, and is pronounced [leid]. The past tense of this verb is led. This is sometimes wrongly spelt as lead because the pronunciation is the same as that of the metal: • as heavy as lead, pronounced [led].

leadership Leadership is the state or rank of a leader; it also denotes qualities associated with a good leader: • elected to the leadership • to lack leadership potential. The use of the noun in place of leaders is disliked by some people: • China's leadership appeared to be stepping up efforts to promote its version of recent history (Daily Telegraph).

leading-edge The adjectival use of leading-edge is best avoided where advanced or up-to-date would be adequate or more appropriate: • leading-edge technology • a leading-edge project.

• The noun leading edge denotes the forward edge of an aerfoil, wing, etc. The noun is also used figuratively, in the vogue expression at the leading edge: • This impressive product is at the leading edge of both lexicographical and computer technology (Harrap catalogue).

A modern derivative of the term is bleeding-edge, which refers to the very latest technological advances, as yet largely unproved in real applications and thus carrying a certain degree of risk: • This company is cautious about adopting bleeding-edge technology that may cause problems in the long run.

See also CUTTING EDGE.

leading question A leading question suggests or prompts the expected or desired answer, such as: • Did you see the defendant stab his wife with a kitchen knife? • Do you approve of the wholesale slaughter of innocent animals for their fur?

• Many people object to the frequent use of the term with reference to questions that are challenging, unfair, embarrassing, etc.: • Are there any going to be any redundancies at the factory? 'That's a leading question.'

leak The use of the verb and noun leak with reference to the unofficial, surreptitious, or improper disclosure of secret information is acceptable in most contexts: • Details of the report were leaked to the press. • The managing director's secretary denied all responsibility for the leak.

• The verb leak is used both transitively and intransitively in this sense: • He leaked the story.

• The story leaked out.

leak or leak? These two words are occasionally confused since they are pronounced in the same way. Leak describes an outpouring of liquid or something else escaping a container: • oil leaking from the pipe. It should not be confused with leek, which refers to a vegetable with a white bulb and long cylindrical stem: • a bowl of leek soup.

leaned or learnt? Either word may be used as the past tense and past participle of the verb learn: • She leaned/learnt forwards to open the window.

• Leaned may be pronounced [leend] or [lent]; learnt is always pronounced [lent].

See also -ed or -t?

leaped or leapt? Either word may be used as the past tense and past participle of the verb leap: • They leaped/leapt across the very wide ditch.

• Leaped may be pronounced [leep] or [lept]; leapt is always pronounced [lept].

See also -ed or -t?

learn or teach? The use of the verb learn in place of teach is wrong: • He's teaching [not learning] me to swim.
To learn is to gain knowledge; to teach is to impart knowledge.

The verb learn is followed by the preposition of or about in the sense 'receive information'; • When did you learn of [or about] the accident? It is followed by the preposition about in the sense 'gain knowledge': • We learnt about the Vikings last week.

learned or learnt? Either word may be used as the past tense and past participle of the verb learn: • Have you learned/learnt the words of the song?

• The past tense and past participle learned may be pronounced [lərn] or [lɜːnt]; it should not be confused with the two-syllable adjective learned [lərnid], meaning 'erudite': • a very learned professor.

See also -ed or -t; LEARN or TEACH?

learning curve The phrase learning curve refers to the process of acquiring new knowledge or experience as if represented by a graph. (The rate of learning is usually not uniform: the curve may rise steeply at the beginning, when a large amount of knowledge is acquired in a relatively short time.) It is a vague term, often found in business contexts, and should not be over-used: • to help new employees up the learning curve • Most schools have only just started their second year of LMS and head teachers admit to being on a steep learning curve (The Bookseller).

learning difficulties In modern usage, this is the approved designation for any condition that hinders a person from absorbing basic information or learning simple skills:

• The local authority is opening a new department to support youngsters with learning difficulties. • They employ a number of adults who have learning difficulties. It has replaced such terms as retarded or mentally handicapped, which are now considered unacceptable.

• People with learning difficulties may also be termed learning-disabled.

learned see LEARNED or LEARNT?

learned see LEARNED or LEARNT?

least-developed countries see DEVELOPMENT.

leave or let? The use of the verb leave in place of let, especially in the expressions let go and let be, is regarded as incorrect and avoided by many users: • You mustn't let [not leave] go of the rope. • I told the children to let [not leave] him be. The expressions leave alone and let alone, however, are virtually interchangeable in the sense of 'refrain from disturbing, bothering, interfering with, etc.': • Leave/Let the dog alone.

• Leave alone also means 'allow or cause to be alone', in which sense it cannot be replaced by let alone: • Please don't leave me alone -- I'm afraid of the dark.

Let alone is also used as a set phrase meaning 'not to mention' or 'still less': • They can't afford minced beef, let alone fillet steak.

See also LET.

led see LEAD or LED?

leech see LEACH or LEECH?

leek see LEAK or LEEK?

leeward This word has two possible pronunciations. The generally accepted pronunciation is [lerəerd] but [luoərd] is used in nautical contexts.

legacy This word is sometimes misspelt. Note the -acy ending.

• With the advent of computers in recent years legacy has expanded beyond its original meaning of 'inherited gift' or 'something handed down from an ancestor or predecessor' and may now also refer specifically to essential computer software that has been in use for some time but has become costly and difficult to maintain: • legacy software • legacy system.

legal see LAWFUL, LEGAL or LEGITIMATE?

legalize see DECRIMINALIZE or LEGALIZE?

legendary The use of the adjective legendary in the sense of 'very famous or notorious' may be misleading or confusing: • The legendary Dick Turpin rode a horse called Black Bess. • Listening to recordings of the legendary Andrés Segovia during the 1930s... (Reader's Digest).

• The context of the second example makes it clear that Andrés Segovia existed in fact, not legend, but the first example is ambiguous.

legible or readable? The adjective legible describes something that can be deciphered and read; readable describes something that may be read with interest, enjoyment, or ease: • legible handwriting • a very readable novel.
letter writing

Readable is also used as a synonym for 'legible':
• The text is barely readable without a magnifying glass.
See also ILLEGIBLE or UNREADABLE

Legionary see LEGIONNAIRE.

Legionnaire. Note the spelling of this word, particularly the -enn-. A legionnaire is a
(former) member of a military legion, such as the French Foreign Legion, the British
Legion, or the American Legion; the noun also occurs in the name of a serious disease,
legionnaires' disease.
• Legionnaire should not be confused with the noun legionary, which has a single n and specifically refers to a member of an ancient Roman legion.

Legitimate see LAWFUL, LEGAL or LEGITIMATE?

Leisure This word, meaning 'time spent free from work', is sometimes misspelt. Note the -ei- spelling.
• Leisure is commonly pronounced [lezhə] in British English and [leezhə] in American English.

Leisurely The word leisurely may be used as an adjective or, more rarely, as an
adverb, meaning 'without haste': • stroll at a leisurely pace; • She walked leisurely up
the garden.

Lend or loan? The word lend is used only as a verb; in British English loan is used
principally as a noun: • He lent me his pen; • Thank you for the loan of your lawn mower.
The use of loan as a verb is widely regarded as an Americanism. It is becoming increasingly acceptable, however, with reference to the lending of large sums of money, valuable works of art, etc.: • The bank will loan us the money we need to finance the setting up of the new venture; • This picture has been loaned to the gallery by the Duke and Duchess of Kent.
• The use of the verb lend in place of barrow is wrong; • Can I barrow [not lend] your umbrella, please? To lend is to give for temporary use; to
barrow is to take for temporary use.

Lengthways or lengthwise? Either word may be used as an adverb in British English: • Fold the sheets lengthways/lengthwise before ironing it.
• As an adjective, and as an adverb in American English, lengthwise is preferred to lengthways.
See also -WISE or -WAYS

Lengthy The adjective lengthy means 'tediously, excessively, or unusually long'; it
should not be used in place of long as a neutral antonym of short: • The children became very restless during the headmaster's lengthy speech. • She has long [not lengthy] dark hair and brown eye.
• Lengthy may be pronounced [lengthy] or [length]. Note the consonant sequence -rth- in the spelling.

Leopard This word is sometimes misspelt. The most frequent error is the omission of
the o which is not pronounced.

Less see FEWER or LESS?

Less-developed country see DEVELOPMENT.

Lest This word, meaning 'in case something bad happens', is a relic of Old English
that has become relatively infrequent in everyday conversation. It is followed by
should or a verb in the SUBJUNCTIVE: • I did not mention it, lest it should give her
needless pain. • We should go now lest we be late. Many people consider its use pretentious and avoid it altogether.

Let Used in the imperative, let should be followed by an object pronoun rather than
a subject pronoun: • Let them try; • Let him finish his meal first. • Let Paul and me [not I]
see the letter.
• Let's, an informal contraction of let us, is used to introduce a suggestion or proposal made to the other member(s) of one's group: • Let's stay here.
The preferred negative form of let's is let's not, although don't let's is also used in British English: • Let's not go to the party.
See also HERE OF KENT? LEAVE or LET?

Letter writing. There are a number of conventions relating to the style and layout
of a formal or semiformal letter.

1 The sender's address, followed by the
date, should appear at the top of the letter,
usually in the right-hand corner. The recipi ent's name and address appear below
this, on the left-hand side of the page. Punctuation of the address - a comma at the
end of each line (except the final line, which has a full stop) and sometimes after
the house number - is optional.

2 The salutation (Dear Sir, Dear Madam,
Dear Miss Jones, Dear Mr Brown, or, in-
creasingly, under American influence, Dear
James Chapman, etc., where the writer wants to avoid the formality of Dear Mr Chapman and the informality of Dear James is set on a separate line, beginning with a capital letter and ending with a comma in British English, a colon in American English.

See also Abbreviations: Ms., Mrs or Miss?

3 The letter itself should be divided into paragraphs, with or without indentation. The style and content of the letter depend on the level of formality (see also CommEse).

4 The letter is closed with any of a number of fixed phrases, the most frequent being Yours sincerely (if the recipient’s name is used in the salutation) or Yours faithfully (if an impersonal salutation, such as Dear Sir or Dear Madam, is used). Like the salutation, this phrase is set on a separate line, beginning with a capital letter and ending with a comma.

5 The signature is usually followed by the sender’s name, title, and office (if appropriate).

6 Some of these conventions also apply to informal letters: the position of the sender’s address, the punctuation and layout of the salutation and closing phrase, etc. An informal letter may begin with the recipient’s first name and end with any of a number of expressions, such as Best wishes, Yours, Love, etc. The recipient’s name and address are usually omitted and it is rarely necessary to add the sender’s name after the signature.

leukaemia This word is sometimes misspelt. Note the three sets of vowels: eu, ae, and ia in British English. The American English spelling is leukaemia.

level The noun level serves a useful purpose in a variety of literal and figurative senses but is sometimes superfluous or unnecessarily vague: • a high level of unemployment (high unemployment) • an increase in the noise level (more noise) • decisions made at management level (decisions made by the management).

level playing field The phrase level playing field is increasingly used in figurative contexts, denoting a situation where all can compete on equal terms: • There [the single European market rules] are meant to establish a level playing field for competition between community countries in the single market (The Guardian). • I don’t mind trying to compete on a level playing field with the rest of the book trade, but . . . (The Bookseller).

liable or likely? Both adjectives are used to express probability, followed by an infinitive with to. Liable refers to habitual probability, often based on past experience; likely refers to a specific probability that may be without precedent: • The dog is liable to bite strangers. • The dog is likely to bite you if you pull his tail. • The shelf is liable to collapse when it is filled with books. • The shelf is likely to collapse if it is filled with books. Careful users maintain the distinction between the two words.

• The adjectives apt and prone, which are similar in sense and usage to liable, principally refer to disposition, inclination, or tendency: • He is apt/prone to lose his temper.

Liable also means ‘responsible (for)’ or ‘subject (to)’: • She is liable for their debts. • He is liable to epileptic attacks. Prone is interchangeable with liable in the second of these senses: • She is prone to indigestion.

See also Likely.

liaison The noun liaison and its derived verb liaise are often misspelt, the most frequent error being the omission of the second i.

• Some people object to the widespread use of liaison and liaise as synonyms for ‘communication’, ‘communicate’, or ‘(maintain) contact’, and the use of liaison to refer to an illicit sexual relationship. • Ooser liaison between teachers and social workers might have prevented this tragedy. • Overseas travel will be necessary to liaise with subsidiaries and distributors in Europe, North America, and the Far East. • His wife found out about his liaison with his secretary.

libel or slander? Both words refer to defamatory statements: libel is written, drawn, printed, or otherwise recorded in permanent form; slander is spoken or conveyed by gesture.

• In informal contexts the word libel is often used in place of slander.

Both words may be used as nouns or as verbs. The final / of libel is doubled before a suffix beginning with a vowel in British English; the final r of slander is never doubled.

See also spelling.

N
library The pronunciation of this word is [ˈlaɪbrəri]. Careful users avoid dropping the second syllable [ˈlaɪbrə], but this pronunciation is frequently heard.

licence or license? In British English, the noun is spelt licence, the verb license: • a television licence • an off-licence • poetic licence • to license one’s car • (un)licensed premises • licensing hours. In American English, both the noun and verb are spelt license.

lichen This word has two pronunciations [ˈlɪkən] or [ˈlɪkən]. Some people prefer the first of these, which is the same pronunciation as liken.

licorice see liquorice.

lie see lay or lie?

lieu see lieu.

lieutenant This word is often misspelt, the most frequent errors occurring in the first syllable: lieu-. The pronunciation of this syllable varies. The most frequent pronunciation in British English is as /liː/, in nautical contexts the pronunciation is as /lɛɪə/, and in American English, the pronunciation is as /lɪə/.

lifelong or livelong? The adjective lifelong means ‘lasting or continuing for a lifetime’: • my lifelong friend • his lifelong admiration for her work. The adjective livelong, meaning ‘very long’ or ‘whole’, is chiefly used in the old-fashioned poetic expression all the livelong day.

✓ Lifelong is usually written as a solid compound, the hyphenated form life-long being an accepted but rare variant.

Livelong, which is etymologically unrelated to the word live, is pronounced [ˈlɪvəlɔŋ].

lifestyle Some people object to the frequent use of the term lifestyle, a synonym for ‘way of life’, by advertisers, journalists, etc.: • urban lifestyle • consumer lifestyle values • lifestyle packaging • The spread of AIDS is likely to have tremendous effects on the personal lifestyles of many people.

There is an increasing tendency today for lifestyle to be written as a one-word compound. It is sometimes hyphenated (life-style) but not usually written as two separate words.

lighted or lit? Either word may be used as the past tense and past participle of the verb light. Lit is the more frequent in British English: • Have you lit the fire? • He lit his pipe. • The hall was lit by candles.

✓ Used adjectively before a noun, lighted is the preferred form: • a lighted torch • a lighted match • a lighted cigarette. If the adjective is modified by an adverb, however, lighted maybe replace by lit: • a well-lit room • a badly lit stage.

lightning or lightening? These two words are often confused. Lightning is a flash of light produced by atmospheric electricity: • thunder and lightning. Lightening is also used as an adjective to describe things that happen very quickly: • the lightening strike by postal workers. Lightening is the present participle/gerund of the verb lighten: • lightening someone’s load.

light-year A light-year is a unit of distance, not time; careful users avoid such expressions as: • It happened light-years ago. • The wedding seemed light-year away.

✓ A light-year is the distance travelled by light in one year (approximately six million million miles); the term is used in astronomy.

likable see likeable or likable?

like The use of like as a conjunction, introducing a clause that contains a verb, is disliked by many users and is best avoided in formal contexts, where as, as if, or as though should be used instead: • The garden looks as if [not like] it has been neglected for many years. • As [not like] the headmaster said, corporal punishment is not used in this school.

✓ The use of like as a preposition, introducing a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase, is acceptable in all contexts: • The garden looks like a jungle. • Like the headmaster, she disapproves of corporal punishment. • His sister writes like him. • Like you and me, they are keen amateur photographers. (Note that the preposition like is followed by the object pronoun him, me, etc., not the subject pronoun he, I, etc.)

The use of as in place of the preposition like may change the meaning of the sentence: • As your father, I have a right to know. • Like your father, I have a right to know. • She plays like a professional. • She plays as a professional. In other contexts, the two prepositions may be virtually interchangeable: • He was dressed as like a policeman. • They treat me like an idiot.

The habitual use of like in spoken conversation as a meaningless filler: • He was, like, really angry,
-like

The suffix -like may be attached with or without a hyphen in British English: *spadelike* or *spade-like* *autumnlike* or *autumn-like.*

- When -like is added to one- or two-syllable words that do not end in *-i,* the hyphen is often omitted: *dreamlike* *birdlike* *papery* *particular* in words that are well-established in the English language, such as *life-like* and *lady-like.* Words that end in *-i,* especially those that end in *-i,* and words of three or more syllables usually retain the hyphen when adding *-like:* *coal-like* *doll-like* *potato-like.*

likeable or likable? Both spellings of this word are acceptable. See spelling 3.

likely In British English the adverb likely, meaning 'probably,' is not used on its own in formal contexts; it is usually preceded by *very,* *quite,* *more,* or *most:* *They will very likely arrive tomorrow morning.* *I'll most likely see you at the party.*

- Some people avoid the problem by using *probably* or by rephrasing the sentence to make *likely* an adjective: *They will probably arrive tomorrow morning.* *They are likely to arrive tomorrow morning.*

As an adjective, *likely* may stand alone or be modified by an adverb: *a likely effect* *a more likely explanation.*

See also liable or likely?

limited Some people object to the use of the adjective *limited* as a synonym for *small,* *little,* *few,* etc.: *a limited income* *with limited assistance* *of limited education.*

- *Limited* is best reserved for its original meaning of *restricted:* *Their powers are limited.* *We have a limited choice.* *He finds it difficult to work in a limited space.*

lineage or lineage? The noun lineage, pronounced [ˈlini]. means 'line of descent' or *ancestry;* the noun *lineage,* pronounced [ˈlaini], means 'number of printed or written lines:' *the emperor's lineage* *payment based on lineage.*

- Neither word is in frequent use: *lineage* is largely restricted to formal contexts, *lineage* to the world of printing and publishing.

Lineage is also used as a variant spelling of *lineage,* in which the case it is pronounced [ˈlaini].

lineament or liniment? The noun lineament, meaning 'feature,' is largely restricted to formal or literary contexts: *the noble lineaments of his face.* It should not be confused with the noun liniment, denoting a liquid rubbed into the skin to relieve pain or stiffness: *a bottle of liniment.*

linger The verb linger is followed by the preposition over in the sense 'be slow': *He lingered over his breakfast.* It is followed by *on* in the sense 'dwell on': *Don't let your mind linger on the unpleasant details.*

lingua franca A *lingua franca* is a language adopted as a common language by speakers whose native languages are different: *English is rapidly becoming the lingua franca of the world.*

- The expression *lingua franca* is pronounced [ˈlinɡwə fræŋkə] *lingua francas* [ˈlinɡwə frankəs].

The phrase *lingua franca* comes from Italian, meaning 'Frankish language.'

linguist The noun linguist may denote a person who knows a number of foreign languages or a specialist in linguistics, the study of language: *Mr Evans, an accomplished linguist, was a great help to us on our European tour.* *At yesterday's lecture the linguist Noam Chomsky expressed his theory of language structure.*

- A modern linguist is someone who can speak or is studying modern European languages such as French, German, and Spanish. Although the noun linguist is rarely ambiguous in context, it may be replaced, if necessary, by the synonym polyglot (for the first sense) or linguist or linguist (for the second sense).

liniment see lineament or liniment?

liquefy or liquify? Both spellings of this word are acceptable, although the first is generally preferred.

liqueur or liquor? The spellings of these words are sometimes confused. A *liqueur* [ˈlɪkœər] or, less commonly, [ˈlɪkœɾ] is a sweet alcoholic drink taken after a meal. *Liquor* [ˈlɪkœɾ] is any alcoholic beverage.
liquidate or liquidize? The verb liquidate is used in finance: • to liquidate a company • to liquidate one’s assets, and as an informal euphemism for ‘kill’: • He liquidated his rivals. To liquidize is to make something liquid, usually in a blender or liquidizer: • Liquidize the fruit and add it to the whipped cream.

liquify see LIQUEFY or LIQUIFY?

liquor see LIQUEUR or LIQUOR?

licorice There are two possible pronunciations of this word. The traditional pronunciation [likərɪs] is preferred by many, but [likərɪs] is also acceptable and widely used.

* In American English the noun is spelt licorice.

lit see LIGHTED or лит?

literal, literary or literate? Literal means ‘word for word; exact’; literary means ‘relating to literature’; literate means ‘able to read and write: (well-educated): • a literal translation • the literal meaning of the word • literary works • a literary critic • They are barely literate • a highly literate candidate.

* All three adjectives are ultimately derived from Latin littera ‘letter’; but they are not interchangeable in any of their senses.

Some people avoid using literate to mean ‘well-educated’ where there is a risk of ambiguity. In a job advertisement, for example, literate may refer to anything from a basic ability to read and write to degree-level qualifications.

In such combinations as • computer literate, the word literate is reduced to the sense of ‘ competent; able; experienced’.

literally The use of the adverb literally as an intensifier, especially in figurative contexts, is disliked by many users: • It literally rained all night. • I was literally tearing my hair out by the time they arrived.

* The effect of this usage may be misleading or ambiguous: • We were literally starving, or quite absurd: • She literally laughed her head off.

As the opposite of figuratively, literally may be used to indicate that a metaphorical expression is to be interpreted at its face value: • The dog had literally bitten off more than it could chew.

literary, literate see LITERAL, LITERARY or LITERATE?

literature Some people object to the use of the noun literature, with its connotations of greatness, to denote brochures, leaflets, and other written or printed matter: • They’re sending us some literature about holidays in the Far East.

* The principal objection is that literature is an unnecessary synonym for some other noun – it has no one-word equivalent in general use for this sense – but ‘that so reputable a word should be put to so menial a duty’ (H.W. Fowler, A Dictionary of Modern English Usage).

little see FEW, FEWER or LESS?

live The adjective live, meaning ‘not recorded’: • a live broadcast • live music, is increasingly used in the extended sense of ‘actually present’: • They have never performed in front of a live audience.

* This usage inevitably leads to humorous associations with the principal meaning of live, i.e. ‘living’ or ‘alive’, in contrast to ‘dead’.

livelong see LIFELONG or LIVELONG?

livid The adjective livid may be used to describe a range of colours, from the dark purple colour of a bruise, through the greyish-blue colour of a livid sky, to the pale complexion of somebody who is livid with fear.

* Livid is perhaps most frequently used in the sense of ‘very angry’: • His mother will be livid when she finds out. This usage is best restricted to informal contexts.

living room see LOUNGE.

llama see LAMA or LLAMA?

loaded see LADEN or LOADED?

loan see LEND or LOAN?

loath, loth or loathe? Loath and loth are different spellings of the same adjective, meaning ‘unwilling’ or ‘reluctant’; loathe is a verb, meaning ‘detest’: • He was loath/loth to move to London. • He loathes working in London. Loath and loathe are frequently confused: • The team would be loathe to see the manager go. For this reason some users prefer loth, the more distinctive spelling of the adjective.

* The adjectives loath and loth are pronounced [loth], with the final th sound of bath; the verb loathe is pronounced [loð], with the final th sound of bath.

Note the spelling of the adjective loathsome, which may be pronounced [lothsəm] or [lothsəm].
locale, locality or location? All three nouns mean ‘place’, but they are not altogether synonymous. Locale, the most formal of the three, refers to a place that is connected with a particular event or series of events: • an unlikely locale for a human rights convention (example adapted from COBUILD corpus). Locality often refers to a neighbourhood or geographical area: • There are a number of bookshops in the locality. Location means ‘site’ or ‘situation’ and is often used as a formal or pretentious substitute for the nouns place, position, etc. (see also locate): • to move to a different location • the location of the town hall.

locate The verb locate and its derived noun location are best avoided where find, situate, place, position, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • I can’t find [not locate] my front-door key. • The shrub should be planted in a sheltered position [not location]. • Offices in a prestigious part of the City [not a prestigious City location].

location see locale, locality or location?

lone see alone or lone?

longevity This word, meaning ‘length of life’, is usually pronounced [lɔŋˈdʒiːvəti] although [lɔŋˈdʒeɪvəti] is also frequently used.

† The pronunciation [lɔŋˈdʒeɪvəti] is nonstandard.

longitude This word, referring to the distance west or east of the Greenwich meridian, may be pronounced with a j-sound [lɔŋˈdʒaɪvəti] or a g-sound [lɔŋˈdʒɪvəti]. Note that there is no r before the i in longitude, either in spelling or pronunciation, unlike latitude.

loo see toilet, lavatory, loo or bathroom?

lookalike The noun lookalike denotes another person, usually a famous person: • a Prince Charles lookalike • the Marilyn Monroe lookalike competition.

† Some users consider lookalike to be an unnecessary synonym, of American origin, for the noun double.

Lookalike is sometimes written as a hyphenated compound, look-alike.

loose or loosen? The verb loose means ‘release’, ‘set free’, or ‘undo’; the verb loosen means ‘make or become less tight’: • She loosed the lion from its cage. • He loosened his belt. The two verbs are not interchangeable.

† The adjective loose, which means ‘free’ or ‘not tight’, may be applied to something that has been loosed: • The lion was loose. • His belt was loose.

The verb loose is rarely used in modern times. It is occasionally confused with the verb lose, which is similar in spelling and pronunciation (loose is pronounced [luːs]; lose is pronounced [luːz]).

lorry Lorry and lorry driver, the traditional British English terms, are increasingly being overtaken by their American equivalents truck and truck driver or trucker.

lose see loose or loosen?

lot The expressions a lot of and lots of are best avoided in formal contexts, where they may be replaced by many, much, a great deal of, a good deal of, etc.: • We have many [not lots of] books. • They received a great deal of [not a lot of] help.

† Note that a lot should never be written alot.

See also many; much; singular or plural?

loth see loath, loth or loathe?

lots see lot.

loud or loudly? Loud may be used as an adjective or adverb: • a loud noise • He shouted as loud as he could. The adverb loudly may be substituted for loud in all its adverbial uses except the phrase out loud, meaning ‘audibly’: • She read the poem out loud [not out loudly]. It is not always acceptable, however, to use the adverb loud in place of loudly: • They protected loudly [not loud] and angrily. • loudly [not loud] dressed in a blue-and-yellow striped jacket.

lounge The lounge of a private house or flat is the room used for relaxation, recreation, and the reception of guests, as opposed to the dining room: • She showed the vicar into the lounge. Some people consider the synonyms sitting room and living room to be less pretentious than lounge.

† The word lounge also denotes a room in a hotel, pub, club, or airport: • Coffee will be served in the lounge. • The passengers waited in the departure lounge.

The noun parlour, an old-fashioned synonym for lounge, is derived from the French verb parler, meaning ‘to speak’: • The maid has tidied the parlour. The word parlour also has a number of
specific uses: beauty parlour / ice-cream parlour.

The term drawing room (short for withdrawing room), another synonym, has connotations of grandeur and formality: the ladies retired to the drawing room.

Sitting room, living room, drawing room, and dining room are sometimes hyphenated in British English.

lour or lower? Lower in the sense of 'look sullen; look gloomy or threatening' may also be spelt lour and is pronounced to rhyme with tower: clouds lowering/loosening over the sea. The word is etymologically unrelated to lower, used as an adjective to mean 'relatively low', and as a verb to mean 'move down'. Lower in these senses is pronounced to rhyme with mower.

low or lowly? The adjective low, the opposite of high, has a number of senses:

- a low wall
- a low temperature
- a low voice
- low morale
- to feel low.
The adjective lowly, meaning 'humble' or 'inferior', is much more restricted in usage and is formal:

- their lowly abode
- a lowly job.

Both adjectives may be applied to the same noun with different connotations:

- the low status of women in 18th-century society
- the lowly status of the gardener.

As an adverb, lowly can mean 'in a low manner' or 'in a low manner', but it is very rarely used in either sense. The word low may be used adverbially:

- to lie low
- to bow low
- low-heeled shoes
- a low-cut neckline.

lower see lour or lower 2

lower-case see capital letters.

low-hanging fruit This phrase, meaning 'easy pickings' or 'an easy target', is a vogue term of relatively recent coinage: The company has concentrated on picking off some low-hanging fruit. A favourite example of contemporary business jargon, it is best avoided in formal contexts.

low-key Some people object to the frequent use of the adjective low-key, meaning 'of low intensity', in place of modest, restrained, subdued, unassuming, etc.: The reception was a very low-key affair.

The variant low-keyed is also used from time to time.

lowly see low or lowly 2

low-profile see profile.

LTD see plc.

lumbar or lumber? These two words are identical in pronunciation and are sometimes confused. Lumbar is an adjective used in medical contexts, referring to the lower part of the back and sides: a lumbar puncture / the lumbar vertebrae. lumber is used as a noun or verb. In the sense of 'unwanted articles', the noun lumber is chiefly found in British English: the lumber room; in the sense of 'timber' it is chiefly found in American English: heaps of lumber. The verb lumber means move heavily, awkwardly, etc.

- An elephant lumbered past; in the sense of 'burden' it should be restricted to informal contexts: I got lumbered with the job of delivering the leaflets.

lunch or luncheon? Both nouns denote a midday meal: a luncheon is usually a formal social occasion; lunch is often a light informal meal or a fuller meal at which business is conducted: The Prince of Wales was the guest of honour at the luncheon. We stopped at a pub for lunch. They discussed the terms of the contract at their business lunch.

- The use of luncheon as a synonym for 'lunch' is generally considered to be old-fashioned, surviving only in such terms as luncheon meat and luncheon voucher.

See also dinner, lunch, tea or supper 2

lure see allure or lure 2

luxuriant or luxurious? Luxuriant means 'profuse', 'lush', or 'fertile'; luxurious means 'sumptuous' or 'characterized by luxury':

- luxuriant vegetation
- a luxurious hotel. The two adjectives are not interchangeable: luxuriant is principally applied to things that produce abundantly; luxurious to things that are very comfortable, expensive, opulent, self-indulgent, etc.

- The noun luxury is also used as an adjective, meaning 'desirable but not essential': luxury goods. Its use as a synonym for 'luxurious', especially in advertisements: a luxury car / a luxury hotel / luxury flats, etc., is disliked by some.

lying see lay or lie 2
macabre Note the spelling of this word, which ends in "re" in both British and American English. It means 'relating to death; gruesome': • a macabre tale. The r is not always sounded in speech, the pronunciations [mækəbɪ] and [məkəbɪə] being equally acceptable to most people.

machinations This word, meaning 'devious plots or conspiracies', is traditionally pronounced [məkəˈniʃənz], although the alternative pronunciation [məkəˈniʃənz] is becoming increasingly common.

machismo The noun machismo, denoting aggressive masculinity: • the machismo of the leader, may be pronounced [məˈkæʃɪmoʊ] or [məˈkæʃɪməʊ]. Note that the ch does not have the sh sound of machine.

* Derived from a Spanish word meaning 'male' (see MACHO), it is a derogatory word that is disliked by some users of British English and is best restricted to informal contexts.

macho The adjective macho, the Spanish word for 'male', has derogatory connotations in English, describing a man who displays his masculinity in an aggressive or ostentatious way: • a macho image • the macho hero. Like MACHISMO, macho should not be used in formal contexts or overused in informal contexts; it is sometimes better replaced by masculine, virile, male, etc.

* The ch in macho, unlike machismo, is always pronounced [ʃ], not [x]: [mæʃo].

macro- and micro- Macro- means 'large'; micro- means 'small'. Both prefixes are used in scientific and technical terms, such as: • macroeconomics • microorganism • macrobiotic • microtome • macrocom • microcom • macroscopic • microscopic • microprocessor • microchip. The use of macro- and micro- in other contexts, e.g. • macrocontact • microkirt, in place of the adjectives large, great, small, tiny, etc., is best avoided.

* The insertion of a hyphen between the prefix macro- or micro- and a word beginning with a vowel is optional; for example, macroeconomics and microorganism may be replaced with macroeconomics and micro-organism.

See also HYphen 1.

Madam or Madame? Madam is a polite term of address for woman; the word may be written with a capital or lower-case m: • Would madam like a cup of coffee? • Can I help you, madam? Madame, written with a capital M, is the French equivalent of Mrs. • Wax models of famous people are displayed at Madame Tussaud's.

* The usual English pronunciation of both words is [ˌmædəm]; Madame is also pronounced [məˈdæm] or [məˈdɑːm], anglicized forms of the French pronunciation.

Madam is also used as an impersonal salutation in LETTER WRITING and as a formal title of respect: • Dear Madam • Madam President, in both these uses the word is always written with a capital M.

Mesdames, the plural of the French word Madame, also serves as the plural form of Madam. It is usually pronounced [məˈdæm] in English.

The noun madam denotes a woman who runs a brothel or a girl who is impudent, conceited, precocious, badly behaved, etc.

mad cow disease This is the popular name for the cattle prion disease bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). Note that mad cow disease is not the approved term for the condition among scientists or farmers.

* Note also that mad cow disease (or BSE) only affects cattle. The human version is variant CJD, a new form of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, thought to be caused by exposure to BSE.

magic or magical? The adjective magic is more closely related to the art or practice of magic than magical, which is used in the wider sense of 'enchanting': • a magic wand • a magic potion • a magic spell • a magical experience • the magical world of make-believe.

* The two adjectives are virtually interchangeable.
in many contexts, although magic is retained in certain fixed expressions, such as: • magic carpet • magic lantern, etc., and magical is sometimes preferred for things that happen as if by magic: • a magical transformation. Magic, but not magical, is also used in informal contexts to mean 'wonderful': • The holiday was magic!

magnate or magnet? These two words are occasionally confused. A magnate is a person with great wealth or influence. A magnet is a piece of iron or other substance that attracts iron. Figuratively, magnet is used to describe a person or place that attracts many people: • The region became a magnet for computer businesses.

• The endings of the words are pronounced magnate: [mæɡnet] and magnet: [mæɡnit].

magnitude The noun magnitude is best avoided where size, extent, importance, greatness, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • the magnitude of the problem.

• The expression of the first magnitude is used in astronomy to describe the brightness of a star; its figurative use, in the sense of 'greatest' or 'most important', is disliked by some people: • a disaster of the first magnitude.

magnum opus The Latin expression magnum opus is used to refer to the greatest work produced by a writer, artist, musician, etc.

• The phrase magnum opus is pronounced [magnum opûs]; its plural forms are magnus opus and magna opera [magná ópéra].

Mahomet see MUSLIM or MOSLEM?

mail Since the development of worldwide electronic networks the word mail, which originally referred solely to traditional postal services, has come to represent a much wider range of communications: • He spent the morning opening the mail. • The message on the screen told her she had mail. Thus, while let me mail you the results may still be understood to mean that the material in question will be sent by post, it could also mean that some electronic means is intended. To avoid confusion, careful users should specify the method they intend to use, whether it be mail, mail (conventional post), e-mail (a typed message sent via the Internet), voicemail (a telephone message recorded electronically), etc.

maintenance The noun maintenance, which is related to the verb maintain, is often misspelt, a common error being the substitution of -tain - for -ten - in the middle of the word. Note also the -ance ending.

major Some people dislike the frequent use of the adjective major in place of great, important, chief, principal, serious, etc.: • There was certainly major news interest in the details of the background of a man convicted of murdering five members of his family (Daily Mail).

• Although major is an accepted synonym of these words, it should not be used to excess.

majority and minority Majority means 'more than half of the total number'; minority means 'less than half of the total number': • the majority of the books; • a minority of his friends.

• Majority and minority should not be used to denote the greater or lesser part of a single item: • the greater part (not the majority) of the house; • less than half (not the minority) of the meal. A majority may be as small as 51%; a minority may be as large as 49%. For this reason, majority and minority are best avoided where most, a few, etc., would be more appropriate.

• Majority and minority may be singular or plural nouns. If the people or items in question are considered as a group, a singular verb is used; if they are considered as individuals, a plural verb is used: • Only a minority was in favour of the proposal. • The majority have refused to pay.

• See also COLLECTIVE NOUNS; SINGULAR OR PLURAL?

The two nouns also denote the difference between the greater and lesser numbers; in this sense they are always singular: • The Labour candidate’s majority has increased.

male or masculine? The adjective male refers to the sex of a person, animal, or plant; it is the opposite of female: • a male kangaroo • male genital organs. Masculine is applied only to people (or their attributes) or to words (see GENDER); it is the opposite of feminine: • masculine strength.

• With reference to people, male is used only of the sex that does not bear children; it is used to distinguish men or boys from women or girls but has no further connotations: • We have a male French teacher and a female German teacher.

• Masculine, on the other hand, may be used of both sexes; it refers to characteristics, qualities,
malevolent, malicious or malignant? All these adjectives mean 'wishing harm to others', but there are differences of sense, usage, and application between them: ● a malevolent look ● malicious gossip ● cruel, malignant intentions.

● Malignant is the strongest of the three, describing an intense desire for evil. It is common in medical contexts, in the sense of 'cancerous', 'resistant to treatment', or 'uncontrollable': ● a malignant tumour.

The adjectives malevolent and malicious are interchangeable in many contexts. Malicious, the more frequent, is also used in law with reference to premeditated crime: ● malicious intent.

man Many people consider the use of the noun man as a synonym for 'person' to be ambiguous and/or sexist: ● the best man for the job ● All men are equal. With reference to individual human beings of unspecified sex, it is usually possible to use person, people, human being, individual, everyone, worker(s), citizen(s), etc., in place of man or men: ● the best person for the job ● All people are equal.

● Idiomatic expressions, such as the man in the street, to a man, as one man, or be one's own man, and compounds, such as manhole, manpower, man-made, or man-hour, should not be changed but may be replaced with a synonym or paraphrase if necessary: ● without exception (for to a man) ● be independent (for be one's own man) ● workforce (for manpower) ● synthetic (for manmade).

Some users also object to the verb man, preferring operate, staff, work, run, etc.

The use of man in the sense of 'male adult' dates from around the 11th century. Before his time, in Old English, the noun man denoted a human being of either sex and the nouns wer and wif were used to distinguish between male and female (respectively). Wif was subsequently combined with man to form wifman, from which the noun woman is derived. The word wif also survives in the noun wife and in compounds such as fishwife and midwife, where the -wife element simply means 'woman' and does not necessarily refer to a married woman.

See also BOY; CHAIR; GENTLEMAN; MALE or MASCULINE?; MANKIND; NON-SEXIST TERMS; SEXISM: WOMAN.

manageable This word meaning 'able to be controlled': ● manageable in small numbers, retains the -e- to indicate the softness of the g.

manager or manageress? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

mandatory The adjective mandatory is usually pronounced [mændərə].

● The alternative pronunciation [mændətə] is disliked by many users and is best avoided.

Some people object to the frequent use of mandatory as a synonym for 'compulsory', 'obligatory', or 'essential': ● A degree in archaeology is desirable, but not mandatory, for this post.

man-hours see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

mankind The use of the noun mankind to denote human beings collectively may be confused with its second sense of 'men in general' (as opposed to womankind, meaning 'women in general'): ● the future of mankind.

● The word humankind, coined as a replacement for the first sense of mankind, is disliked by many users. Humanity may be ambiguous, having the additional meaning of 'kindness', but the human race is acceptable to most: ● the future of the human race.

See also MAN; NON-SEXIST TERMS.

man-made see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

man-management The term man-management denotes the management of people rather than processes, usually in an industrial environment: ● An honour graduate is required, with 3 years man-management experience.

● Like other man-compounds, the term is disliked and avoided by some users: ● You will need to have skills in people management (Daily Telegraph).

See also MAN.

manoeuvre This word is sometimes misspelt. Note the vowel sequence -oew- and
the -re ending in British English. The American spelling is maneuver.

See also -ae and -oe.

The derived adjective is manoeuvre in British English, manœuvre in American English.

manpower see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

mantle or mantle? A mantle, or more commonly a mantelpiece, is a shelf forming part of an ornamental structure round a fireplace. A mantle is a cloak or something that covers: • shrouded in a mantle of secrecy. • The spellings mantle and mantelpiece are also possible for the fireplace shelf, but are rarer.

many In formal contexts the adjective many may be used in place of the informal expressions a lot (of) and lots (of) (see lot). Many is also used in informal contexts, especially in negative and interrogative sentences: • She doesn’t buy many clothes. • Have you got many pets? In some positive sentences, however, a lot of and lots of are more idiomatic than many in informal contexts: • We have a lot of [not many] books. • Many denotes a large number (as opposed to much, which denotes a large amount); it is therefore used with a plural verb. • Many have disappeared. • Many houses were destroyed. However, in the idiomatic expressions many a . . . and many’s the . . . a singular verb is used: • Many a child has dreamt of becoming film star. • Many’s the time I’ve walked down this road.

margarine The usual pronunciation of this word has a soft g (marj-gar-ine).

• The original pronunciation, with a hard g, as in Margaret, is now rarely used, even though it is more in keeping with the spelling and the etymology of the word.

marginal Some people object to the use of the adjective marginal as a synonym for 'small' or 'slight': • marginal changes • a marginal improvement • a marginal effect • a student of marginal ability. • Marginal means 'close to a margin or limit', sometimes with reference to a lower limit: • marginal profit • a ceremony of marginal, not primary importance.

The adjective also has a number of specific uses, notably in politics: • a marginal seat (or constituency) is one in which the Member of Parliament has only a small majority. Marginal is also used to describe land on the edge of cultivated areas that is too poor to produce many crops.

marginalize The verb marginalize means 'treat as unimportant' or 'relegate to the fringes of society, an organization, etc.' Sometimes spelt marginalise (see -ise or -ize?), it is chiefly used in the passive: • British fears being marginalised in the EU. • Opponents of a stem military response risk being marginalised on the back benches. • The arts are no longer marginalized (The Guardian). A vogue term, marginalize is disliked by some people as an example of the increasing tendency to coin new verbs by adding the suffix -ize to nouns and adjectives. It should not be overused in formal contexts.

marital see MARRIAGE or MARRIAGE?

market forces The phrase market forces refers to anything that affects or influences the free operation of trade in goods or services, such as competition or demand, as opposed to (artificially imposed) government controls. It is in danger of becoming overused as a vogue term: • The printing of this holy work [the Bible] should be subjected to market forces (The Bookbinder). • Green market forces are working in the appliance manufacturers' favour (Daily Telegraph).

marquess or marquis? A marquess is a British nobleman who ranks below a duke and above an earl; a marquis is a nobleman of corresponding rank in other countries. The word marquis is sometimes used in place of marquess.

• Note that marquess is a masculine title, despite the apparently feminine ending -ess. The female counterpart of a marquess or marquis is called a marchioness, although the term marquise is sometimes used for the non-British feminine title.

Marquess and marquis have the same pronunciation, [markisi], in British English, but the non-British title is sometimes pronounced [markise].

marshal see MARRIAGE or MARSHAL?

martial or marital? These two adjectives are sometimes confused, being similar in spelling. Martial means 'of or relating to war or military matters': • martial music • martial arts • martial law. Martial means 'of or relating to marriage': • marital problems • marital status • marital vows. The word marital is also found in the adjectives extra-marital, pre-marital, etc., and martial in the compound noun and verb court-martial.
martial or marshal? The pronunciation of these two words is identical and they are sometimes confused. The adjective martial means 'of or relating to war or military matters' (see MASTERS or MILITARY). Marshal may be used as a noun, meaning 'officer' or 'official', or as a verb, meaning 'arrange', 'assemble', or 'guide': • Field Marshal Montgomery. • One of the marshals pushed the damaged car off the racetrack. • to marshal the facts. • We were marshalled into the courtroom.

Note that the second element of the compound noun and verb court-martial is -martial not -marshal.

The word marshal is sometimes misspelt with -l at the end. The -l should be doubled only before -ed, -ing, and -er (in British English), and in the surname Marshall.

masculine see MALE or GENDER

massage The verb massage is increasingly used in the figurative sense of 'manipulate' (figures, data, etc.) to make them more acceptable: • to massage the accounts. • to massage the results of the survey. This usage is best restricted to informal contexts.

masterful or masterly? Masterful means 'domineering'; masterly means 'very skilled'. • His masterful approach made him unpopular with the staff. • The team reached their fifth World Cup final with a display of masterly efficiency (The Guardian).

The two adjectives relate to different senses of the noun master, from which they are both derived: 'person in authority' (masterful) and 'expert' (masterly).

Masterful is sometimes used in place of masterly; • a masterful performance by the soloist, but many users prefer to maintain the distinction between the two words.

mat, matte or matrice? The adjective matte, meaning 'not shiny', has the variant spellings mat and matte. Matte is the most frequent spelling in British English: • a matte finish. • matte black paint. The spelling mat is preferred in American English.

materialize The use of the verb materialize in place of happen or turn up is disliked by some users: • The threatened strike is unlikely to materialize. • Her friends didn’t materialize so we left without them.

In formal contexts the word is best restricted to its original meaning of 'make or become real': • They watched in horror as the spirit materialized before their very eyes.

mathematics see -ICS

matrimony This word, describing the state of marriage, is sometimes misspelled.

• The correct pronunciation is matrimony with the stress on the first syllable.

matrix The noun matrix denotes the substance or environment within which something originates, develops, or is contained. It is also a technical term in fields such as mathematics, computing, printing, anatomy, and linguistics. In general contexts matrix is disliked by many as a vague word and often better replaced by setting, background, framework, environment, etc.: • the matrix in which primitive societies evolved.

• Matrix has two plural forms, matrices or matrixes, either of which is acceptable to most users.

matt, matte see MAT, MATT or MATTE

mattress Note the -t- and the -s in this word, which is often misspelt.

maximal, maximize see MAXIMUM

maximum The noun and adjective maximum refer to the greatest possible quantity, amount, degree, etc.: • a maximum of twenty guests. • the maximum dose.

The noun maximum has two plural forms, usually in technical contexts, maximums and maxima.

The adjective maximum is more frequent than its synonym maximal.

The verb maximize means 'increase to a maximum'; it is best avoided where increase would be adequate or more appropriate: • The initial brief is to maximize sales of existing products. Some people also dislike the use of maximize to mean 'make maximum use of': • to maximize resources.

may or might? Might is the past tense of may (see CAN or MAY?): • She may win. • May we sit down? • I thought she might win. • He said we might sit down. In the last two examples, might cannot be replaced with may. In the first two examples, however, might can be substituted for may with a slight change of meaning: • She might win expresses a greater degree of doubt or uncertainty than She may win. • Might we sit down? is a more tentative request than May we sit down?
May and might are both used in the perfect tense. May have expresses a possibility that still exists; might have expresses a possibility that no longer exists: • She may have won: I didn't hear the result. • She might have won: she hadn't fallen on the last lap.

maybe or may be? Maybe, meaning perhaps: • Maybe the letter will come tomorrow, is often confused with the phrase may be, the verb may and the verb be: • It may be that she has missed the train.

mayaress A mayaress is the wife of a male mayor or a woman who assists or partners a mayor of either sex at social functions and on ceremonial occasions. The use of the term mayaress to denote or address a female mayor is incorrect.

me see I or ME.

mean see 1 MEAN.

meaningful The adjective meaningful should be avoided where important, significant, serious, worthwhile, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • a caring, loving, and meaningful relationship • a meaningful experience.

Meaningful is best reserved for its literal sense of 'having meaning': • meaningful utterances • a meaningful smile • a highly meaningful pause.

means In the sense of 'method', means may be a singular or plural noun; in the sense of 'resources' or 'wealth' it is always plural: • A means of reducing engine noise was developed.
• Several different means of transport were used. • His means are insufficient to support a large family.

See also singular or plural.

meantime or meanwhile? Meantime is chiefly used as a noun, in the phrases in the meantime and for the meantime; meanwhile is chiefly used as an adverb: • He wrote a letter in the meantime. • We have enough for the meantime. • Meanwhile, I had phoned the police.

Meantime may also be used as an adverb, in place of meanwhile, and meanwhile as a noun, in place of meantime, but these uses are less frequent.

medal or meddle? These two words should not be confused. Medal is a noun, denoting a metal disc, cross, etc., given as an award; meddle is a verb, meaning interfere: • a gold/silver/bronze medal • Don't meddle in other people's affairs.

media The word media, frequently used to refer to television, radio, newspapers, etc., as means of mass communication, is one of the plural forms of the noun medium: • The media act as publicity agents for writers. • Television is an influential medium.

The plural of medium in the sense of 'spiritual intermediary' is mediums. Either plural form may be used for other senses of the noun; agency through which something is transmitted: • the mediums (or media) of air and water for transmitting sound, 'means of communication'; • English and French are the media (or mediums) of instruction.

The increasing use of media as a singular collective noun is unacceptable to many people and is best avoided: • There has been a failure to educate the young to the benefits of trade unions, leaving the field open for a hostile media (The Guardian). Media is also used adjectively in front of other nouns: • a media event is an event that is deliberately created for extensive coverage by the mass media.

mediaeval see MEDEIVAL or MEDIAEVAL.

mediate The verb mediate is followed by the preposition in in the sense 'mediate in a situation': • An independent adviser was called in to mediate in the dispute. In the sense 'mediate between people', it is followed by between: • Who will mediate between the union and the management?

medicne The word medicine is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent error being the substitution of e for the first i. This letter is sometimes not sounded in speech, resulting in the two-syllable pronunciation [medsin]. Some users prefer the full pronunciation [medisin].

mediaeval or mediaeval? The two spellings of this word are both acceptable. The spelling mediaeval is far more frequent in British English and is standard in American English.

See also -AE and -OE.

mediocre This word, meaning of indifferent quality, is sometimes misspelt. Note the ending -cre.

• Some users object to such expressions as quite
medio and very mediocre, considering that something either is or is not mediocre.

Mediterranean Note the spelling of this word, particularly the single t, the -tr- and the -ean ending. It may help to associate the central syllables with the Latin word terra, meaning 'earth, land', from which they are derived.

medium, mediums see media.

meet with In British English the phrasal verb meet with should be restricted to the sense of 'experience' or 'receive'. • I hope he hasn't met with an accident. • Does it meet with your approval?
◆ The American use of meet with in the sense of 'have a meeting with' is disliked by many British users: • We met with the managing director this morning.

The phrasal verbs meet up with and meet up are widely regarded as unnecessary synonyms for 'meet' and are best avoided, especially in formal contexts: • I met (up with) her at the theatre. • They met (up) in the park.

mega- Some people object to the use of the prefix mega-, meaning 'great' or 'large', in nontechnical contexts, as in: • mega-motorway • mega-trend • mega-merger • mega-budget • mega-thesis. • The prefix is often used as an adjective in its own right, meaning 'very large and impressive': • The new leisure complex is really mega. This usage is best restricted to very informal contexts.

In science, the prefix mega- means 'one million': a megaton is one million tons. In computing, the prefix mega- means 2^20: a megabyte is 1,048,576 bytes.

meltdown In nuclear physics, the noun meltdown refers to the melting of the core of a nuclear reactor, caused by a defect in the cooling system. It is also used figuratively with reference to any disastrous event, especially a stock-market crash: • Meltdown Monday.
◆ Given the very serious nature of a meltdown (in the literal sense of the word), some people object to the figurative application of the term to comparatively trivial issues, such as a fall in company profits.

melted or molten? Melted is the past tense and past participle of the verb melt; it is also used as an adjective: • The chocolate (has) melted. • Serve the asparagus with melted butter. Molten is used only as an adjective, meaning 'melted' or 'liquefied': • molten iron • molten rock.
◆ The use of the adjective molten is restricted to substances that become liquid at very high temperatures.

membership Membership is the state of being a member: • to apply for membership. The noun is also used to denote the number of members of an organization: • Membership has increased this year. Its frequent use in place of members, however, is disliked by some people: • We must consult the membership.

memento The word memento is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent error being the substitution of o for the first e, through confusion with such words as moment and momentum. It may help to associate the mem- with memory and re-member.
◆ Memento has two acceptable plural forms, mementos and mementoes.

mental The use of the adjective mental as a synonym for 'stupid', 'foolish', 'mentally ill', 'mentally deficient', etc., should be avoided as it is very likely to cause offence: • They must be mental to set off in such terrible weather. • Her youngest son's a bit mental, and the other children tease him.
◆ The principal meaning of mental is 'of or involving the mind': • mental illness • mental arithmetic. The adjective is also used in the sense of 'relating to disorders of the mind': • a mental hospital • a mental patient, although recent usage prefers • psychiatric hospital and • a psychiatric patient, and a mentally ill person would more correctly be described as being in poor mental health.

The term mentally handicapped was formerly the accepted term for a person suffering from intellectual impairment of some kind. Note that the term is now avoided by many people and such alternatives as learning-disabled (see LEARNING DIFFICULTIES) are preferred.

mentholated or methylated? These two words should not be confused. Mentholyticated refers to the addition of menthol, a medicinal substance found in peppermint oil; methylated refers to the addition of the poisonous substance methanol: • a mentholated lozenge • methylated spirits.
meretricious or meritorious? Meretricious means 'superficially attractive' or 'insincere'; meritorious means 'having merit' or 'praiseworthy'. - meretricious glamour - a meritorious deed. Both adjectives are fairly formal in usage.
- The adjective meretricious originally meant 'of a prostitute'; like meritorious, it is ultimately derived from the Latin verb merēre, meaning 'to earn' or 'to deserve'.
- Note the spellings of the two words, particularly the second vowel: meretricious has the e of its Latin root; meritorious has the i of merit.

merge The verb merge is followed by the preposition with or into in the sense 'merge with [or into] something else': - On the horizon, the sea appeared to merge with [or into] the sky. In the sense 'merge with another business, company, etc.', it is followed by with: - Cadbury merged with Schweppes, and into in the sense 'form a combined group': - The three companies merged into one.

meta- Some people object to the increasing use of the prefix meta- in the sense of 'transcending' or 'of a higher order': - A suggestion of metafiction, of uncertainties found to be themselves fictionally productive (London Review of Books). - Could this be a symptom of a developing metaculture? - Large parts of the town centre are now dominated by cinemas and other manifestations of meta-entertainment.
- The prefix has a number of other accepted meanings: 'change': - metamorphosis; 'after', 'behind', or 'beyond': - metatarsus.

metal or mettle? These two words, which have the same pronunciation, are sometimes confused. A metal is one of a group of mineral substances that are good conductors of heat and electricity. Mettle means 'strength of character': - He was given no chance to prove his mettle.
- The confusion may arise from the fact that mettle was originally derived from metal.

metallurgy This word, meaning 'the science of metals', is usually pronounced [mætələrɪ], although it can be stressed on the first and third syllables [mætələrɪ].
- The second pronunciation is rarer in British English but standard in American English.

metamorphosis The usual pronunciation of this word is [mætmɔːrfoʊsɪs] with the stress on the third syllable.
- The alternative pronunciation [mɛtəmɔːrfoʊsɪs] is possible but disliked by many people.

metaphors A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is used, not with its literal meaning, but to suggest an analogy with something else. The comparison is implicit, not introduced by like or as: - the winds of change - an icy voice - stone deaf.
- Many expressions used in everyday speech are metaphorical but they are so frequently used that they are hardly thought of as metaphors: - the arm of a chair - a branch of a bank; and many occur in well-known idioms: - not up my street - feel under the weather - if you play your cards right.

Metaphors have been used very successfully with striking effect in literature. There are biblical examples: - Thy word is a lamp unto my feet (Psalm 119:105) and countless poetic ones: - I see a lily on thy brow . . . and on thy cheek a fading rose (Keats, La Belle Dame Sans Merci). However, as used by modern politicians and journalists, metaphors can often be tired and overworked: - the cure for unemployment - fighting against inflation - light at the end of the tunnel.

Mixed metaphors, where two or more different metaphors are used in one sentence, should be avoided: - In resurrecting these allegations they are just fuelling the flames of racism - The committee's task was to iron out all the battle-necks in the system.

meter or metre? The spelling of these words is often confused, probably partly because the American spelling of the measurement metre is meter. In British English, a meter is a measuring instrument: - gas meter - speedometer. A metre is the basic metric measurement of length and is used in derived measurements: - kilometre - millimetre.
- Metre is also the technical term for the regular rhythmic arrangement of syllables in poetry. Note however that in compounds describing such measures, the spelling -meter is followed: - pentameter, 'a line having five stresses'.

methodology The noun methodology denotes a body or system of methods, rules, principles, etc., used in a particular area of activity: - the methodology of teaching.
- The use of the noun in other contexts, especially as a synonym for 'method': - experimental design
methylated

methodology • unstructured pragmatic methodologies is disliked by many people and is best avoided.

methylated see MENTHOLATED or METHYLATED?

meticulous The adjective meticulous is widely used and accepted as a synonym for 'pains-taking' or 'scrupulous': • meticulous attention to detail • a meticulous secretary.
• Some people, however, object to the use of the adjective in a complimentary manner, restricting it to the pejorative sense of 'fussy' or 'excessively careful': • If you weren't so meticulous you'd have finished the cleaning hours ago.

Meticulous originally meant 'timid', being ultimately derived from metus, the Latin word for 'fear'.

metonym A metonym is a word or phrase that is used as a substitute for something else to which it is related or of which it is a part. Thus, Rome may serve as a metonym for the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, Hollywood for the US film industry, and the crown for the monarchy. Care should be taken to use only metonyms whose relevance will be correctly interpreted.

metre see METER or METRE?

mettle see METAL or METTLE?

mezzanine This word, meaning 'intermediate storey between two floors', is usually pronounced [mɛzənɪn]. The alternative [mezənən] is sometimes used and is closer to the original Italian.
• The last syllable in both pronunciations should rhyme with keen and not with line.

micro- see MACRO- and MICRO-.

mid see AMID, AMIDST, MID or MIDST?

middle see CENTRE or MIDDLE?

midget see DWARF.

midwifery This word is sometimes mispronounced. In British English the correct pronunciation is [ˌmɪdˈwɪfəri].
• In American English -wif- may be pronounced like wife.

might see CAN or MAY; MAY or MIGHT?

migraine The usual pronunciation of this word, meaning 'a severe and recurrent headache', is [mɪˈɡrən].
• The alternative pronunciation [mɪˈɡræn] is also acceptable and is standard in American English.

mileage or milage? Mileage is the more frequent spelling of this word, milage being an accepted but rare variant: • The exceptionally low mileage makes this car a good buy.

See also SPELLING 3.
• In its figurative sense of 'benefit' or 'usefulness', the noun is avoided by some users in formal contexts: • It was an interesting subject, though, and the chairman . . . got the maximum intellectual mileage out of it (The Guardian).

militate or mitigate? The verb militate, which is usually followed by the preposition against, means 'have a powerful influence or effect': • His left-wing opinions militated against his appointment as headmaster. The verb mitigate means 'moderate' or 'make less severe': • The judge's decision did little to mitigate the suffering of the bereaved parents. • mitigating circumstances.
• The two verbs are occasionally confused, mitigate being wrongly used in place of militate.

millenarian or milkenarian? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

millennium This word and its plural form millennia are often mispelt, the most frequent error being the omission of the second n: • Over the millennia, as earth movements cause new formations (Reader's Digest advertisement for Marvels and Mysteries of the World Around Us).
• Spelling mistakes may be avoided by associating the word, which means 'a thousand years', with the -ll- of millipede and millimetre (from Latin mille 'thousand') and the -nn- of annual and perennial (from Latin annus 'year').

The phrase the millennium was much used around the year 2000 to refer to the start of the new (third) millennium: • celebrations to mark the millennium.

There is some confusion about when millennia start and end. As there was no year 0 AD, we calculate in thousand-year segments from the year 1 AD. This means that the second millennium began on 1 January 1001 and ended on 31 December 2000. Despite this reckoning, in modern usage 1 January 2000 (rather than the strictly correct 1 January 2001) is often considered to have been the beginning of the third millennium.

See also CENTURIES.
millionaire The word millionaire is sometimes misspelt. Note the -ll, but only one n.

mimic This word, meaning 'imitate': • He likes mimicking the teacher, is sometimes misspelt. Note that a k is added before the suffixes -ed, -ing, and -er. Mimicry does not, however, have a k.

See also SPELLING 1.

mincemeat The noun mincemeat principally denotes the sweet mixture of dried fruit, suet, sugar, and spices that is used to fill mince pies, traditionally baked and eaten at Christmas. To avoid confusion, meat that has been minced (minced meat) is usually called mince in British English and ground meat in American English.

miner or minor? These two words are occasionally confused. A miner is a person who works underground in a mine. Minor is an adjective that is the opposite of major, meaning 'less important; relatively unimportant': • have a minor part in a play; and is also used to refer to a musical scale. As a noun, minor means a person who is still legally a child, one who has not yet reached the age of majority.

• Miner and minor have the same pronunciation [ˈmɪnər].

miniature Miniature, meaning 'small in size', is sometimes misspelt. Note the spelling -iar.

minimal, minimize see MINIMUM.

minimum The noun and adjective minimum refer to the smallest possible quantity, amount, degree, etc.: • a minimum of four employees • the minimum requirements.

• The noun minimum has two plural forms, usually in technical contexts, minima or minima.

The frequent use of minimal in the sense of very small is disliked by some users: • The response to our advertisement was minimal – we received only two applications. • minimal effort • minimal risk. Note also that minimal should never be used with a modifier: • rather minimal.

The verb minimize means 'reduce to a minimum'; it is best avoided where reduce would be adequate or more appropriate: • The new safety regulations should minimize the danger. Some people also object to the widely accepted use of minimize to mean 'play down' or 'bemine': • to minimize one’s achievements.

minor see MINOR or MINOR?

minority see MAJORITY and MINORITY.

minus The use of the preposition minus in the sense of 'without' or 'lacking' is best restricted to informal contexts: • She came home minus her umbrella.

• Some people also avoid using the noun minus as a synonym for 'disadvantage' in formal contexts: • Having to move to the South is one of the minuses of my new job: we'll never be able to afford to buy a house there. see also PLUS.

minuscule This word is often misspelt, the most frequent error being the substitution of an i for the first u. The word is pronounced [ˈmɪnəskjuːl].

minutiae The plural noun minutiae, meaning 'small, minor, or trivial details', may be pronounced [ˈminəʃuːə] or [ˈminəʃuːɪə].

• The minutaie of the problem are of no interest to me.

• Minutia, the singular form of the noun, is rarely used.

• The noun minutiae is best avoided where details would be more appropriate: • discuss the details [not minutiae] of a contract.

Note the spelling of minutiae, particularly the three final vowels -iæ.

miscellaneous This word, meaning 'of a variety of items', is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the -sc- or -sc- ending.

mischievous The correct pronunciation of this word is [mɪʃəˈvjuːs].

• The mispronunciations [mɪʃəˈvjuːs] and [mɪʃəˈvjuːs] are heard from time to time but are avoided by careful speakers. The word is often misspelt: particular attention should be paid to the order and position of the vowels.

misogynist Note the spelling of misogynist, which refers to a person who hates women. The word derives from Greek misogyn 'hatred' and gyné 'woman' as in gynecology, the branch of medicine concerned with women’s diseases.

• Misogynist is usually pronounced [mɪˈsɔɡɪnst], although the first syllable is very occasionally pronounced with a long i, as in my.

Miss see MS, MRS or MISS?

miss The verb miss, meaning 'regret the loss or lack of', is sometimes wrongly used
mission statement

with not: • I miss not having a car means 'I was happier before I had a car', not 'I wish I had a car'.
• This error is not confined to informal spoken contexts: • Passengers... ask me [a ship's doctor] if I miss not being a 'proper' doctor (Reader's Digest).

See also AIR MISS or NEAR MISS?

mission statement A mission statement is a statement made by a company or other organization summarizing its values and objectives: • The staff have been given a new mission statement. Some people consider the phrase jargonistic and avoid using it.
• A variant is vision statement.

mis-spelled or misspelt? Either word may be used as the past tense and past participle of the verb misspell • You have misspelt my name.
See also -ed or -t?
• Misspelled may be pronounced [mɪsˈpɛlt] or [mɪsˈpɛlt]; misspelt is always pronounced [mɪsˈpɛlt].

Note the spellings of the two words, particularly the single l of misspelt and the -s- of both words.

mistrust see DISTRUST or MISTRUST?
misunderestimate see ESTIMATION.
misuse see ABUSE or MISUSE?
mitigate see MUTATE or MITIGATE?
mix Some people object to the increasing use of the noun mix in place of range: • A wide mix of subjects will be taught at the college.
• In the sense of 'combination' or 'mixture', mix is found in compounds such as marketing mix, 'the various elements that need to be coordinated in a marketing plan'. Some users, however, object to its use in formal contexts.

mnemonic The word mnemonic, referring to something that aids the memory (e.g. the spelling rule 'i before e except after c'), causes spelling and pronunciation problems. The initial m is silent; the word is pronounced [mɪnəˈmɪk].

mobile As a noun, mobile has enjoyed a massive revival in use in recent years through the widespread introduction of mobile phone (portable telephones commonly referred to simply as mobiles); • I tried to reach you on your mobile. Mobile telephone or mobile phone is usually preferred to mobile in formal contexts.
• Mobile phone has largely replaced the former terms cellphone and cellular phone in British English.
moccasin This word, used to describe a soft leather shoe without a heel, is sometimes misspelt. Note the -cc- but single s.

modal see VERBS.

modern or modernistic? The adjective modern means 'of the present time' or 'contemporary'; modernistic means 'characteristic of modern trends, ideas, etc.' and is sometimes used in a derogatory way: • modern society • modernistic architecture.
• Modern has a wider range of sense and usage than modernistic, which is largely restricted to objects, designs, thoughts, etc., that are conspicuously modern or unconventional.

modus operandi The Latin phrase modus operandi is used in formal English to refer to a particular method of working: • The committee discussed the modus operandi of the new working party.
• The phrase modus operandi is pronounced [mɒdəs ˈɒpərəndəi, ˈɒpərəndi]; its plural is modi operandi [mɒdi ˈɒpərəndi].

modus vivendi The Latin phrase modus vivendi is principally used in formal English to denote an arrangement or compromise between conflicting parties: • This modus vivendi enabled them to complete the job without further disruption.
• The literal meaning of the phrase modus vivendi is 'way of living', but some people object to its use in place of the English expression way of life.

The word modus is pronounced [mɒdəs]; vivendi may be pronounced ['vivəndi] or ['vivəndi].

Mohammed see MUSLIM or MOSLEM?
molten see MELTED or MOLTEN?
momentary or momentous? Momentary means 'lasting for a very short time'; momentous means 'of great significance': • a momentary lapse • The Commons... took the momentous step of opening its doors to the television cameras for the first time (The Guardian).
• The two adjectives relate to different senses of the noun moment, from which they are both derived: 'a very short time' (momentary) and 'significance' (momentous).
Note the difference in stress between the two adjectives: momentary is stressed on the first syllable, momentous on the second. The adverb momentarily should also be stressed on the first syllable (mó·ment·ar·i·ly); the pronunciation (mó·men·tary) is unacceptable to many people.

**mongolism** see downs syndrome.

**mongoose** The plural of the noun mongoose is mongooses; the word should not be treated as a compound of the noun goose (the plural of which is geese).

* Mongoos is derived from the word mungus, of Indian origin, and is etymologically unrelated to goose.

**monogram or monograph?** A monogram is a design made up of a person’s initials: • There was a monogram on the corner of the handkerchief. A monograph is a learned book, treatise, etc., about a single subject.

• He wrote a monograph on Oliver Cromwell. The two nouns should not be confused.

**moot** The adjective moot, meaning ‘debatable’ or ‘open to question’, rarely occurs outside the fixed phrase a moot point: • Whether she will accept this offer is a moot point.

• The verb moot, meaning ‘put forward for debate’, is most frequently used in the passive in formal contexts: • The subject was mooted at our last meeting.

**moral or morale?** These two spellings are sometimes confused. Moral means ‘concerned with the principles of right and wrong’: • the gradual erosion of moral standards: Morale is the extent of confidence and optimism in a person or group: • After the election defeat, the party’s morale sank to an all-time low.

* Moral is stressed on the first syllable (mô·ra·l). Morale is stressed on the second syllable (mô·ra·l). More

**more** The adverb more is used to form the comparative of a number of adjectives and adverbs: • She is more intelligent than her sister. • The trains run more frequently in the summer months. More should not be used with adjectives that already have the comparative ending -er, such as happier, older, etc.

* Other uses of the word more – as the comparative of much or many, or in the sense of further or additional – may lead to confusion: • She has more beautiful dresses may mean ‘her dresses are more beautiful (than mine/yours/etc.), she has other dresses that are more beautiful (than this one); she has a greater number of beautiful dresses (than yours/etc.), or she has other beautiful dresses (in addition to this one).

The phrase more than one, although it implies a plural subject, is used with a singular verb: • More than one accident has happened at this junction. If the sentence is reworded, however, a plural verb is used: • More accidents than one have happened at this junction.

See also comparative and superlative; singular or plural?

**mortgage** This word is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent error being the omission of the silent t.

**mortgagee or mortgageor?** A mortgageor is a person who borrows money by means of a mortgage; a mortgagee is the person or organization, e.g. a building society or bank, that lends the money. The two nouns should not be confused: the mortgagees are the people who are mortgaging their property, i.e. using it as security for a loan; the mortgagees are those who receive this security, not the recipients of the loan itself.

**moslem** see muslim or moslem?

**most** The adverb most is used to form the superlative of a number of adjectives and adverbs: • This is the most expensive picture in the shop. • The prize will be awarded to the child who writes the most neatly. Most should not be used with adjectives that already have the superlative ending -est, such as saddest, youngest, etc.

* Other uses of the word most – as the superlative of much or many, or in the sense of ‘very’ – may cause ambiguity: • This teacher has the most intelligent pupils may mean ‘this teacher has the greatest number of intelligent pupils’ or ‘this teacher’s pupils are the most intelligent in the school’;

• She danced most gracefully may mean ‘she danced very gracefully’ or ‘she danced more gracefully than the other dancers’.

See also comparative and superlative.

The use of most in place of very is generally best avoided, although it is acceptable in certain contexts: • I am most grateful for your assistance. • He spoke most rudely of his former employers.

The adverb mostly, meaning ‘mainly’ or ‘usually’, should not be confused with most: • He writes mostly [not most] for children. • Old people are
motif

motif or motive? These words are sometimes confused. A motif is a recurrent feature which establishes a pattern throughout a work of art, etc.: • a design with a feather motif. A motive is a reason for a course of action: • no apparent motive for the crime.

motivation The use of the noun motivation, which means 'incentive' or 'drive', in place of reason or motive is disliked and avoided by many users: • his reason [not motivation] for deserting his wife and family. • Some people also object to the frequent use of the noun in its accepted sense of 'providing with an incentive' in the context of industrial psychology: • the motivation of the workforce. As Roland Grieben remarked in the Daily Telegraph: 'Motivation is a grossly overworked and abused term for getting the best or more out of people.'

Similar objections may be applied to the use of the verb motivate in place of cause and of motivated as a synonym for 'keen': • an action that may cause [not motivate] her to change her mind • a highly motivated sales manager • a self-motivating entrepreneur.

motive see MOTIF OR MOTIVE?

mot juste The French expression mot juste is used in English to refer to the exactly appropriate word or phrase: • This dictionary of synonyms will help you find the mot juste.

The literal meaning of mot juste is 'right word'. It is sometimes written or printed in italics. Its anglicized pronunciation is [moʊ'ʃt]. The plural is mots justes, with the same pronunciation as the singular.

mouse The plural of the noun mouse, in the sense of 'small animal', is mice. In computing contexts, where a mouse is an electronic device used to move the cursor on the screen, the preferred plural form is mice, though the plural form mouses is sometimes used.

The adoption of mouse in a computing context has inspired a number of derivative terms, among them mouse potato (a person who spends too much time at his or her computer screen) and mouse wrist (an aching wrist caused by repeated clicking of a mouse).

mousse The noun mousse denotes a creamy or foamy preparation. Some types of mousse are for eating: • chocolate mousse • salmon mousse; some are for cosmetic purposes: • styling mousse • body mousse. Note the spelling of this word, which should not be confused with the animals moose and mouse.

The pronunciation of this word is [moʊs].

moustache This word is sometimes misspelt. The most frequent error is the substitution of u for ou in British English. The British English spelling is moustache; the American English spelling mustache. Note also the -che ending.

movable or moveable? This word has two different spellings. Both are acceptable although the first spelling movable, which omits the e before the suffix -able, seems to be more frequent in contemporary usage.

See also SPELLING.

movers and shakers Movers and shakers is an expression used informally to refer to people who get things done, either through their own power and influence or by urging or encouraging others to take action: • the movers and shakers of the film industry.

The phrase should not be overused.

move the goalposts To move the goalposts is to change the rules, requirements, etc., usually to the advantage of the person or organization that sets and changes the rules: • The Government is moving the goalposts again from April 6, with the cut-off point [for eligibility for income support] reduced to 16 hours a week (The Guardian).

The verb move is sometimes replaced by shift or change. The expression is best restricted to informal contexts.

mowed or mown? Either word may be used as the past participle of the verb mow: • Have you mowed/mown the grass yet?

When the participle is used as an adjective, mown is preferred to mowed: • a newly mown lawn • a new-mown hay.

The past tense of the verb mow is always mowed: • I mowed the grass yesterday.

Mr see MS, MRS or MISS?
Ms., Mrs. or Miss? Mr., Mrs., and Miss, shortened forms of the archaic title Mistress, are used before the names of girls and women, according to age and marital status, in letter writing and as polite terms of address. ♦ Miss is traditionally used for girls, unmarried women, and married women who have retained their maiden name. ♦ Miss Mary Baker ♦ Miss Davies ♦ Miss Elizabeth Taylor. In formal contexts, two or more girls or unmarried women with the same surname should be referred to as the Misses BrownSmith, et cetera, rather than the Miss BrownSmith, et cetera.

Mrs., pronounced [mɪz], is used before a woman's married name: ♦ Mrs. Anne Johnson ♦ Mrs. Johnson.

Ms., pronounced [mɪz] or [miz], is used before the name of a woman of unknown or unspecified marital status. It was introduced as a feminine equivalent of the masculine Mr., which makes no distinction between married and unmarried men. Because of its feminist associations, however, the title Ms. is disliked by some people, Ms. is most frequently used in place of Miss, but is best avoided when referring to elderly unmarried women or young girls.

See also SEXISM. The titles Ms., Mrs., and Mr. are usually written without a full stop.

See also ABBREVIATIONS.

much The use of the adjective much in positive sentences is best restricted to formal contexts: ♦ They own much land. ♦ There is much work to be done.

Even in formal contexts, some users prefer to replace much with a large amount of, a great deal of, etc.: ♦ They own a large amount of land. ♦ There is a great deal of work to be done.

In informal contexts, much may be replaced with a lot of or lots of: ♦ There is a lot of work to be done.

See also LOT.

In negative and interrogative sentences, much is acceptable in all contexts: ♦ They don't own much land. ♦ Is there much work to do?

See also MANY; VERY.

mucous or mucus? These two words are sometimes confused. Mucous is the adjective from the noun mucus; mucus is the secretion produced by mucous membranes.

muesli The noun muesli, denoting a type of breakfast food, causes problems of spelling and pronunciation. Note the -ue- in the first syllable, and the -ei ending. The usual pronunciation is [mu:slı], with the first syllable pronounced as in music, but the pronunciation [mu:slı] is also acceptable.

Muhammad see MUSLIM or MOSLEM?

multi- Some people object to the increasing use of the prefix multi-, meaning 'many', to coin new words that are often better expressed by a paraphrase: ♦ a multirole device ♦ a multistage process ♦ her outstanding multitasking abilities (her abilities to perform many tasks at the same time). ♦ Specialist skills are now ignored or swamped in the drive for multi-skilling (The Guardian).

♦ In neologisms of this kind a hyphen is sometimes inserted between the prefix and the word to which it is attached.

municipal The adjective municipal should be stressed on the second syllable [mi:njuˈsepəl], not the first or the third.

muscle or mussel? Muscle means 'fibrous tissue' or 'strength': ♦ His muscles bulged as he took the strain. ♦ The new squad has plenty of muscle. It should not be confused with mussel, which refers to a bivalve mollusc: ♦ The stone was covered by mussels.

Muslim or Moslem? Nowadays the preferred spelling for a follower of the Islamic faith is Muslim, rather than the older spelling Moslem.

♦ Muslim is pronounced with the vowel sound as in put [ˈmʊzlɪm] or as in cup [ˈmʊzlɪm].

The most accepted spelling of the name of the prophet of Islam is Muhammad, rather than Mohammed or Mahomet.

mussel see MUSCLE or MUSSEL?

must The auxiliary verb must expresses obligation, compulsion, necessity, resolution, certainty, etc.: ♦ We must obey the rules. ♦ They must go. ♦ I must finish writing this letter. ♦ You must be very thirsty. In other tenses, and in the negative, must is usually replaced by have to: ♦ We had to obey the rules. ♦ They don't have to go.

♦ The negative form must not (or mustn't) expresses prohibition: ♦ They must not go.

The past tense may have is used only to express certainty: ♦ You must have been very thirsty.

The use of must as a noun, meaning 'something necessary or essential', is best restricted to informal
mute

contexts: • Waterproof clothing is an absolute must for a sailing holiday.

mute see DEAF-MUTE; DUMB or MUTE?

mutual, common or reciprocal? A mutual action or emotion is done or felt by each of two or more people to or for the other(s): • mutual help/destruction/admiration/hatred/ etc. • The feeling is mutual.

• The adjective mutual is superfluous in such phrases as: • a mutual agreement • a mutual exchange • their mutual love for each other.

The frequent use of mutual in place of common, meaning 'shared' or 'joint', is disliked by many users: • a mutual friend • mutual interests • a mutual problem. However, the other senses of common can cause ambiguity: • a common friend may mean 'an unsophisticated, rude friend' as well as 'a friend shared by two people'. Thus expressions such as • our joint friend • the friend we have in common • the friend we share could be used instead.

Reciprocal and mutual are synonymous in the principal sense of the latter: • reciprocal help • reciprocal hatred. Reciprocal can also be used to describe an action or emotion that is done or felt in return: • He praised her new novel, and she expressed reciprocal admiration for his latest film.

my or me? see -ING FORMS.

myself The use of the pronoun myself for emphasis is acceptable to most users but disliked by some: • I disapprove of such behaviour myself. • I myself have never met her.
• Myself should not be used in place of I or me in the following sentences and similar constructions:
• My sister and I [not myself] will do the gardening. • The bill was paid by Richard and me [not myself].

See also I or ME?; SELF.

mythical or mythological? Mythical means 'imaginary'; mythological means 'of mythology': • a mythical danger • a mythological kingdom.

• Both adjectives also mean 'of a myth or myths', in which sense they are virtually interchangeable: • a mythical/mythological character.
naff The adjective naff is a derogatory slang term meaning ‘inferior or worthless; vulgar or tasteless; not stylish’. • a naff film • That tie is really naff. The adjective should be restricted to informal contexts.

naïve, naïve or naff? This word, meaning ‘innocent’ or ‘credulous’, is most commonly spelt naïve or naïve.

- Naïf, the French masculine adjective, is no longer used, naïve (or naïve) being used to describe people of both sexes.

The derived noun is most commonly spelt naïvety or naïvety, although the variants naïvité and naïveté are also found.

Naïve is pronounced [nīev] or [nāev]. Naïvety is pronounced [nīevt] or [nāevt]n.

naked or nude A person wearing no clothes at all may be described as naked or nude: • pictures of naked/nude men.

- The adjective naked, however, has a wider range of usage and application than nude, which is largely restricted to artistic or pornographic human nakedness or to nudism: • nude photography • nudebathing • a naked (not nude) body buried in a shallow grave • naked (not nude) children playing in the sand.

Naked is also used as a synonym for ‘bare’ or ‘uncovered’ in other contexts: • a naked room • a naked flame.

name The verb name, in the sense ‘name a person or something’, is followed by the preposition after in British English: • He was named after his grandfather, and in American English by for: • The airport is named for John F. Kennedy.

naphtha This word, meaning ‘petroleum’, is sometimes misspelt. Note the consonant sequence -phth-. • Note also the spellings of the compounds naphthalene and naphthene.

nation see country or nation

native The word native, used in the sense of ‘nonwhite person’ (originally applied to the indigenous inhabitants of lands colonized by the West), is derogatory and offensive: • The settlers intermarried with the natives.

- The noun and adjective native may be applied to a person, people or animal born in a specified place: • native Spaniards. As a noun, native is followed by the preposition of: • She’s a native of Sweden. As an adjective, it is followed by to: • The bird is native to Australia. This usage is generally acceptable, but some people prefer to avoid the word native where there is a danger of confusion with the derogatory sense: • the indigenous inhabitants [not natives] of Tasmania.

Native American Native American is the preferred modern term for a person descended from one of the indigenous peoples of the Americas: • The rights of Native Americans must be defended. It replaces such former terms as Red Indian and American Indian, which are no longer considered acceptable.

naturalist or naturist? A naturalist is a person who studies animals and plants or an advocate of naturalism (in art, literature, philosophy, etc.); a naturist is a nudist: • Naturalists will appreciate the flora and fauna of the island; naturists can take advantage of its secluded beaches.

nature Such phrases as of this/that nature and in the nature of are often better replaced by more concise or less vague expressions: • Crimes like that [for of that nature] should be severely punished. • This new method of assessment is like [for in the nature of] an examination.

- The word nature is used in other unnecessary circumlocations: • a problem of a difficult nature is a difficult problem • a remark of a flippant nature is a flippant remark; etc.

naturist see naturalist or naturist?

naught or nought? These two words are sometimes confused. Naught means ‘noth-
nauseous

The use of the adjective nauseous in the sense of 'nauseated' or 'suffering from nausea' is acceptable in American English but is best avoided in British English: *I feel sick [not nauseous].*

The principal meaning of nauseous in British English is 'nauseating' or 'causing nausea': *a nauseous smell.*

naval or navel? These two words are sometimes confused. Naval is used to describe something connected with the navy: *a naval officer* • *naval warfare.* The navel is the small depression in the middle of the abdomen where the umbilical cord was formerly attached, and the word is also used in the phrase navel orange.

near or nearly? In the sense of 'almost', the adverb near is sometimes interchangeable with nearly: *I nearly [or near] forgot.* • *It's near [or nearly] impossible.* This use of near may be considered informal or archaic, and nearly is a safer choice in most contexts.

Used in combination with an adjective, especially one that is placed before the noun, near may be preferred to nearly and is usually attached with a hyphen: *a near-perfect copy* • *a near-successful attempt.*

nearby or near by? There is often confusion as to whether this term should be one word or two. Nearby is the preferred form for both adjectival and adverbial senses: *Wolverhampton, Dudley,* and other nearby towns.

Near by may still be used in the adverbial sense: *a town near by.* • *He lives near by.*

nearly see NEAR OR NEARLY?

near miss see AIR MISS OR NEAR MISS?

necessarily There are two possible pronunciations for this word. In the traditional pronunciation, the first syllable is stressed [ne′sæsərɪli], but this is very difficult to say unless one is speaking slowly and carefully. Many users dislike the alternative pronunciation, which has the main stress on the third syllable [nɛsəˈsərɪli].

necessary This word, meaning 'essential', is often misspelt. Note the single c and the -ss-.

née Née, the feminine form of the French word for 'born', is used to indicate the maiden name of a married woman: *Mrs Susan Davies, née Eliot.*

*The pronunciation of née, which is sometimes written without an accent, is [nɛ].*

Née should not be used to indicate a man's original name or pseudonym or a remarried woman's previous married name: *Ringo Starr, born [not née] Richard Starkey* • *Jacqueline Onassis, formerly [not née] Jacqueline Kennedy.*

need Need may be used as a full verb, in the sense of 'require' or 'be obliged', or as an auxiliary or modal verb, indicating necessity or obligation: *We need help.* • *Your daughter needs to wear glasses.* • *He need not leave.* • *Need she reply?*

*The use of need as an auxiliary verb is indicated by the absence of -s in the third person singular and the omission of to in the following infinitive.*

The auxiliary verb need is used only in questions and negative sentences (see the last two examples above) and in certain constructions that have negative force, such as: *All she need buy is food.* • *He need do no more than wait.* • *You need only ask.* • *Nobody need suffer.*

The full verb need may also be used in questions and negative sentences: *He doesn't need to leave.* • *Does she need to reply?*

In the sense of 'require', need is followed by the -ing form of the verb or by a past participle preceded by to be, not by the past participle alone: *This shirt needs washing [not washed].* • *This shirt needs to be washed.*

needless to say The idiomatic expression needless to say is frequently used for emphasis, especially in informal contexts: *Needless to say, the unions intend to campaign against the proposed legislation.*

*The expression is disliked by those who choose to interpret it literally, but is acceptable to most people.*

negative A negative word is one that is used to deny or contradict something. Words such as no, not, nobody, never, and
nothing make the clause in which they appear a negative one. Care must be taken as to where a negative word is placed in a sentence; usually the negative word is placed with the clause whose truth is being denied: • He said he had never been there. • He never said he had been there.

The exception is with verbs such as believe, think, except, imagine, etc., where the negative word is generally placed before the verb: • I don’t think you know what you’re talking about [rather than I think you don’t know...]. • She didn’t expect them to return before dark [rather than She expected them not to return...].

The adjective negative is now often used in a very general way to mean not only ‘lacking in positive features’, but also ‘pessimistic; unenthusiastic’: • You’re taking a rather negative view. • I felt very negative about all his suggestions.

See also DOUBLE NEGATIVE.

neglectful, negligent or negligible? Both neglectful and negligent mean ‘careless’ or ‘heedless’; negligible means ‘very small’, ‘trivial’, or ‘insignificant’: • a neglectful mother • a negligent driver • negligible effect.

The adjectives neglectful and negligent are not completely synonymous: negligent often implies habitual or more serious neglect or negligence, which may be punishable by law.

Note the spelling of negligible, especially the two Ts.

negligible see NEGLECTFUL, NEGLECTFUL or NEGLECTFUL

negotiate The usual pronunciation of this verb is [nɪɡəˈreɪt]. The variant pronunciation [nɪɡəˈseɪt], in which the sh sound is replaced by s, is disliked by some people.

Negress, Negro see BLACK.

neither As an adjective or pronoun neither is used with a singular verb: • Neither towel is clean. • Neither of the towels is [not are] clean.

In the neither... nor construction, a singular verb is used if both subjects are singular and a plural verb is used if both subjects are plural: • Neither his brother nor his sister has [not have] been invited. • Neither his parents nor his friends have been invited.

The use of a plural verb with the pronoun neither or with singular subjects in a neither... nor construction is avoided by careful users, especially in formal contexts, but nevertheless occurs with some frequency: • Neither the ship nor its cargo were able to be salvaged.

When a combination of singular and plural subjects occurs in a neither... nor construction, the verb traditionally agrees with the subject that is nearest to it: • Neither his brother nor his parents have been invited. • Neither his friends nor his sister has been invited. The same principle is applied to singular subjects that are used with different forms of the verb: • Neither you nor I has [not] been invited. • Neither my husband nor I have [not has] been invited. If the resulting sentence sounds awkward or undocumental it may be reordered or rephrased.

The alternatives presented in a neither... nor construction should be grammatically balanced: • She travelled neither by boat nor train may be changed to: • She travelled neither by boat nor by train or: • She travelled by neither boat nor train.

As a pronoun neither should be used only one of two alternatives: • There are two cars outside, but neither is mine. • None (not Neither) of the three candidates arrived on time. However, the use of the neither... nor construction with three or more subjects is acceptable to some people: • They eat neither meat nor fish nor eggs.

The first syllable of neither may be pronounced to rhyme with try or tree. The pronunciation [nɛθər] is more frequent in British English.

See also DOUBLE NEGATIVE; EITHER; NOR.

nephew There are two different pronunciations for this word. Both [nɛfə] and [nɛgə] are acceptable, although some people prefer the first pronunciation.

In American English [nɛgə] is standard.

nerd Nerd, a derogatory slang term for a person who is considered boring or socially inept, is sometimes misspelt. Note the -e- in the middle of the word, and in its adjectival form nerdy.

See also GEEK.

nerve-racking see RACK or WRACK?

net see INTERNET; NETSPEAK.

net or nett? The word net, referring to what remains after the deduction of tax, expenses, loss, packaging, etc., is sometimes spelt nett: • net [or nett] income • net [or nett] profit • net [or nett] weight • 500 kg net [or nett] • to net [or nett] £2000 a month. Both spellings are acceptable in British English, but net is the more frequent.

netspeak The advent of the computer age
network

and the development of the worldwide network of computers known as the WORLD WIDE WEB (or web) or the INTERNET (or net) has inspired a substantial body of new coinages and linguistic conventions, sometimes treated as a separate language in its own right and identified as netspeak. Usages include netizen, netiquette (the conventions of netspeak), Netlish or Weblish (netspeak as a version of English), neturalah (a net administrator), and such technical terms as byte, cookie, crash, domain name, firewall, hit, offline, search engine, server, and URL. The temptation to relax the rules of grammar, for instance by running sentences together without a full stop and ignoring upper case/lower case distinctions, may offend many users.

Some netspeak terms and acronyms have already been absorbed into mainstream English. Examples include 404 (meaning 'guesstimate', from an error message numbered 404) and FAQ (abbreviation for 'frequently asked question').

See also ACRONYMS; CHAT; E-MAIL; INTERNET; SMILEY; TEXT MESSAGING.

network The word network is used as a verb in telecommunications, computing, and the media; it is also increasingly used in general contexts to mean 'communicate or make contact with other people in a similar situation': • to network with clients • Women also often mentioned the help, advice and support they had received from networking with other women (The Bookseller).

• Those four people . . . network extensively and draw on specialist help as appropriate (Alpha). • Networking . . . is one of the current buzz-words of the enterprise industry (The Guardian).

• In computing, networking is the connecting of computers in different places to one another as a means of transferring and sharing information.

neuron or neurone? The conventional spelling of this word, referring to a nerve cell, in scientific contexts is neuron. In more general non-technical contexts, however, neurone is the usual spelling.

neutral For male, female, and neutral (gender-inclusive) terms for people see table at NON-SEXIST TERMS.

never The use of never saw/look/went/etc. in place of did not see/see/go/etc., usually for emphasis, is avoided by careful users in all but a few informal spoken contexts: • I never said a word! Never means 'at no time' and should not be used when referring to a single occasion: • I never met his wife. • I did not meet his wife in town yesterday.

• Never is sometimes used informally as a substitute for a simple negative when expressing surprise: • He never expected that to happen. • We never thought it would work. • I never knew you could play the guitar.

nevertheless see none the less or nevertheless?

New Age The New Age movement, of American origin, is a cultural movement dating from the 1980s that emphasizes alternative modes of spiritual consciousness (embodied in non-Western ideas such as reincarnation, meditation and astrology), and a holistic approach to areas such as medicine and diet. • New Age philosophy • New Age music • New Age publishing.

next or this? The adjective this is often used in place of next with reference to days of the current week, months of the current year, etc.: • I'm not going to the club this Friday. • She's getting married this September.

• As a result, the use of next in similar contexts may lead to ambiguity or confusion: the phrase next Friday, used on a Tuesday, for example, may mean 'three days hence' or 'ten days hence'.

See also LAST.

nice The adjective nice, in the sense of 'pleasant', 'agreeable', 'kind', 'attractive', etc., is often better replaced by an appropriate synonym, especially in formal contexts: • an attractive [not nice] garden • a pleasant [not nice] afternoon.

• In the sense of 'subtle' or 'precise', nice is acceptable in all contexts: • a nice distinction.

Nice is ultimately derived from the Latin adjective nescius, meaning 'ignorant'; it was originally used in the now obsolete sense of 'foolish'.

niceness or nicety? Both these nouns are derived from nice. Niceness is used in the general senses of 'pleasantness', 'kindness', etc.; nicety is restricted to the sense of 'subtlety; precision' and specifically refers to refined details: • the niceness of the weather • the nicety of the weather • the niceties of etiquette.

niche This word may be pronounced to rhyme with pitch or leach. The second of
these pronunciations is closer to the French origin, and is more frequent than the anglicized [nich].

- The word niche is increasingly used with reference to a gap in the market, especially a gap that can be profitably filled; • niche marketing • Niche retailers like Sack Shop, Tie Rack and Knobs & Knockers have shown that they struggle when times get hard (The Guardian).

night see KNIGHT or NIGHT?

- The suffix -nik, of Russian or Yiddish origin, is used to denote somebody who is connected with or does what precedes it: • beatnik • peacenik • refusenik. With the exception of refusenik these words are rather dated; the suffix is less frequently encountered in contemporary usage and should not be indiscriminately attached to other nouns and verbs.
- A refusenik was originally a Jew who had been refused permission to leave the Soviet Union. However, the word is increasingly used in more general contexts to denote somebody who refuses to do something: • a proposal that should satisfy the remaining refuseniks.

nil see ZERO.

nimby Nimby, an acronym of 'not in my back yard', is used with reference to a person or people who object to proposed new developments, such as roads or power stations, in the vicinity of their houses: • the Nimby syndrome • If he has changed his mind, and is now a true non-Nimby, he should withdraw his objection to having homes at the bottom of his garden (The Guardian).

- The noun nimbyism has been coined to denote this selfish opposition (the protesters usually have no objection to the development being sited elsewhere): • Their deep dislike of the kind of gung-ho development and growth-at-all-costs going on in their communities . . . is not crude Nimbyism, as Nicholas Ridley would have us believe (Daily Telegraph).

no see NO ONE or NO-ONE?; YES and NO.

nobody see NO ONE or NO-ONE?

no-brainer This is a slang term for a question or problem whose solution requires little or no intelligence: • The first question was a real no-brainer. As a relatively recent vogue term, it is best restricted to very informal contexts.

noisome The adjective noisome means 'offensive' or 'noxious'; it has no connection, etymological or otherwise, with the noun noise: • a noisome smell.
- Noisome is derived from the verb annoy; it is largely restricted to formal contexts.

non- The prefix non- is used to form a simple or neutral antonym of the word to which it is attached: • a nonprofessional golfer • non-Christian religions.

- The prefix un-, attached to the same words, may have stronger negative force: an unprofessional or un-Christian act, for example, violates professional ethics or Christian principles.

Many people object to the frequent use of the prefix non- to coin unnecessary antonyms: • non-presence (for absence) • non-permanent (for temporary) • non-success (for failure) • non-obligatory (for optional).

Note that, though in fairly wide use, the term nonwhite to describe a person who does not belong to the white racial grouping may be considered offensive by some people because of its assumption that white is the standard skin colour. A more politically correct alternative is person of colour.

See also HYphen t: INflamMABLE.

none The use of a singular or plural verb with the pronoun none depends on the sense and context in which it is used: • None of the milk was spilt. • None of my friends has/hasn't seen the film. In the first of these examples none, like milk, must be used with a singular verb. In examples of the second type some people prefer a singular verb in formal contexts, especially if none is used in the sense of 'not one'. In informal contexts, or in the sense of 'not any', a plural verb is more frequent.

See also singular or Plural?

none the less or nevertheless? These two synonyms are sometimes confused. Traditionally none the less has been written as three separate words, although nonetheless is gradually being accepted. Nevertheless is always written as one word.

- In American English both words are written as single words.

nonflammable see INFLAMMABLE.

non sequitur The Latin expression non sequitur is used in formal contexts to refer
to a statement that does not follow logically from what has just been said. An example of a *non sequitur* is: • *If all males are mortal, then all mortals are male.*

*The literal meaning of non sequitur is 'it does not follow'.*

**NON-SEXIST TERMS** — see table, page 211

**no one or no-one?** Many users prefer the two-word compound *no one* to the hyphenated form *no-one*. Unlike anyone, everyone, and someone, *no one* should not be written as a one-word compound.

*The pronoun no one and its synonym nobody are interchangeable in all contexts. Both are used with a singular verb but are sometimes followed by a plural personal pronoun or possessive adjective (see they): • No one/Nobody likes to see their children suffer.*

**nor.** *Nor* is used in place of or in the neither . nor construction (see *neither*) and to introduce a negative alternative that stands as a separate clause: • *I speak neither German nor Spanish.* • *She hasn’t been to America, nor has her sister.* • *He never watches television, nor does he listen to the radio.*

*In many other contexts nor and or are interchangeable: • The library is not open on Thursday mornings, nor at the weekend.* • *We have no food to eat nor nor clothes to wear.*

*Many users prefer or to nor where the negative force of an auxiliary verb covers both alternatives: • They cannot sing or dance.* • *She has not eaten her biscuits or drunk her tea.*

*The use of nor at the beginning of a sentence is generally acceptable: *Nature is slow to compensate for deforestation. Nor has man been able to make good the damage (Daily Telegraph).*

**normalcy or normality?** These two nouns are synonymous derivatives of the adjective *normal*. *Normality* is the preferred form in British English; *normalcy* is chiefly used in American English.

**north.** *North* or *northern?* As an adjective, *north* is always written with a capital N when it forms part of a proper name: • *North America* • the North Sea. The noun *north* is usually written with a capital N when it denotes a specific region, such as the northern part of England: • *House prices are lower in the North.* In other contexts, and as an adverb, *north* is usually written with a lower-case n: • *We travelled north for ten days.*  • *They live in north London.*  • *The wind is blowing from the north.*

*The adjective *northern* is more frequent and usually less specific than the adjective *north*: • the northern part of the country • in northern France.*

*Like north, northern is written with a capital N when it forms part of a proper name, such as Northern Ireland. With or without a capital N, it also means 'of the North': • a northern/Northern accent.*

**northward or northwards?** Northward is the correct choice when an adjective is needed: • a northward direction. Either northward or northwards may be used when an adverb is required: • *They travelled northward from the city.*  • *The skies were full of birds flying northwards.*

See also *-ward or -wards*.

**no sooner see** hardly.

n? The noun *nostalgia* and its derivatives are most frequently used with reference to a wistful or sentimental yearning for the past: • *She remembered the seaside holidays of her childhood with a deep nostalgia.* • *Listening to old records always makes me nostalgic.* The original meaning of ‘homesickness’ is now rather dated.

*The use of the adjective *nostalgic* in the sense of ‘causing nostalgia’, rather than ‘feeling nostalgic’, is disliked and avoided by some users: • the nostalgic sound of the church bells.*

**not.** The position of the word *not* in a negative sentence may affect its meaning and can sometimes lead to ambiguity: • *All children are not afraid of the dark.*  • *We did not go because it was raining.*  • *He is not trying to win.*  • *He is trying not to win.* The first of these examples, which literally means ‘No children are afraid of the dark’, is easily reworded: • *Not all children are afraid of the dark.* The second example may be reordered or expanded for clarity: • *Because it was raining we did not go.*  • *We did not go because it was raining, we went because we were bored.*

*The frequent use over recent years of *not* as a one-word contradiction of what has just been said is disliked by many people and should be restricted to very informal contexts: • *That's a really cool hat you're wearing – not!* See also *knot or not?; not only . . . but also.*
## NON-SEXIST TERMS

The following table lists words showing male, female, and neutral (gender-inclusive) terms. Cross-references—e.g., see **MANKIND**—are also included to main entries in the Good Word Guide where there is a fuller discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Neutral (gender-inclusive)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>actor</td>
<td>actress</td>
<td>actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>airman</td>
<td>airwoman</td>
<td>pilot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>author</td>
<td>authoress</td>
<td>author or writer (see also -ESS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barman</td>
<td>barmaid</td>
<td>bartender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>businessman</td>
<td>businesswoman</td>
<td>(business) executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cameraman</td>
<td>camerawoman</td>
<td>camera operator or photographer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chairman</td>
<td>chairwoman</td>
<td>chairperson or chair (see CHAIR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>clergyman</td>
<td>clergywoman</td>
<td>member of the clergy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comedian</td>
<td>comedienne</td>
<td>comedian or comic or comic actor or comic entertainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>congressman</td>
<td>congresswoman</td>
<td>member of congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>countryman</td>
<td>countrywoman</td>
<td>native</td>
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<tr>
<td>craftsman</td>
<td>craftsmanwoman</td>
<td>craftsman or craftworker</td>
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<td>draughtsman</td>
<td>draughtswoman</td>
<td>draught or draughtsman</td>
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<tr>
<td>dustman</td>
<td>dustwoman</td>
<td>refuse collector or refuse operative or cleansing operative</td>
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<td>fireman</td>
<td>firewoman</td>
<td>firefighter</td>
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<tr>
<td>forefather</td>
<td>foremother</td>
<td>ancestor or forebear or forerunner</td>
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<td>foreman</td>
<td>forewoman</td>
<td>supervisor</td>
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<tr>
<td>headmaster</td>
<td>headmistress</td>
<td>headteacher or head</td>
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<td>hero</td>
<td>heroine</td>
<td>hero</td>
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<tr>
<td>host</td>
<td>hostess</td>
<td>host or (foul) guide</td>
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<tr>
<td>kinsman</td>
<td>kinswoman</td>
<td>relative or relation</td>
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<tr>
<td>layman</td>
<td>laywoman</td>
<td>lay person or member of the laity</td>
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<tr>
<td>man (noun)</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>person or individual or human being (see MAN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>man (verb)</td>
<td>operate or staff or run or work or equip</td>
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<tr>
<td>manager</td>
<td>manageress</td>
<td>manager</td>
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<td>man-hours</td>
<td>working hours or work hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>mankind</td>
<td>mankind</td>
<td>the human race or human beings (see MANKIND)</td>
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<tr>
<td>man-made</td>
<td>synthetic or artificial or manufactured</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>manpower</td>
<td>workforce or personnel or staff</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>milkman</td>
<td>milkwoman</td>
<td>milk roundperson or dairy salesperson</td>
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<tr>
<td>poet</td>
<td>poetess</td>
<td>poet (see also -ESS)</td>
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<td>policeman</td>
<td>policewoman</td>
<td>police officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>postman</td>
<td>postwoman</td>
<td>delivery officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>salesman</td>
<td>saleswoman or salesgirl</td>
<td>salesperson or sales executive or (sales) representative or sales assistant or shop assistant or sales clerk (American)</td>
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<tr>
<td>sculptor</td>
<td>sculptress</td>
<td>sculptor</td>
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<tr>
<td>serviceman</td>
<td>servicewoman</td>
<td>member of the armed forces</td>
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<td>spokesman</td>
<td>spokeswman</td>
<td>spokesperson or representative or official</td>
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<tr>
<td>sportsman</td>
<td>sportswoman</td>
<td>sportsperson</td>
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<tr>
<td>statesman</td>
<td>stateswoman</td>
<td>statesperson or leader or public figure</td>
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<td>steward</td>
<td>stewardess (air hostess)</td>
<td>flight/cabin attendant</td>
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<td>usher</td>
<td>usherette</td>
<td>usher</td>
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<tr>
<td>waiter</td>
<td>waitess</td>
<td>waiter or server</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weatherman</td>
<td>weathergirl</td>
<td>meteorologist or weather forecaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>workman</td>
<td>workwoman</td>
<td>worker or artisan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
notable, noted or noteworthy? Noted means 'famous': • a noted scientist • The area is noted for its spectacular scenery. Notable and noteworthy both mean 'worthy of notice or of being noted': • a notable [or noteworthy] achievement, but noteworthy is usually used to describe facts or events rather than people: • It was noteworthy that the average price remained the same despite the effects of inflation.

◊ A person or thing that is notable or noteworthy deserves notice, admiration or renown; a person or thing that is noted has already received notice, admiration, or renown.

notable or noticeable? The adjective notable means 'remarkable' or 'worthy of note'; noticeable means 'perceptible' or 'obvious': • a notable achievement • a noticeable change in temperature. The two words should not be confused.

◊ The final -e of the verb notice is retained in noticeable, whereas the final -e of note is omitted in notable.

noted, noteworthy see NOTABLE, NOTED OR NOTEWORTHY.

nothing but The phrase nothing but . . . is used with a singular verb, even if the noun that follows but is plural: • Nothing but crumbs was [not were] left on the plate.

◊ When nothing but is followed by an infinitive, the word to is omitted: • They have done nothing but cry since you left.

The same rules apply to the synonymous phrase nothing except: • Nothing except his shoes was found.

noticeable see NOTABLE OR NOTICEABLE.

not only . . . but also The words or clauses that follow not only and but also must be grammatically balanced: • I have not lost not only my purse but also my car keys [not I have not only lost . . .]. • They not only broke the world record for long-distance swimming but also raised several thousand pounds for charity [not They broke not only . . .].

◊ In many contexts the word also can be omitted: • He not only wrote to the headmaster but (also) consulted his solicitor.

notorious see INFAMOUS OR NOTORIOUS.

nougat The standard pronunciation of this word is [nuoˈɡæt], after the French. The alternative pronunciation [nuˈɡæt] is widely used.

nought see NAUGHT OR NOUGHT?

nouns Nouns are the names of things, places, or people. The main division of nouns is into countable and uncountable nouns. Countable nouns are those which can be preceded by a or the or a number or word denoting number: • a goat • three lemons • the priest • several books. Uncountable nouns are not able to be counted because they are nouns of mass: • flour • water. Some words can be countable or uncountable, according to how they are used: • Have a beer. • Beer is fattening.

◊ Proper nouns refer to a single particular person or thing and begin with a capital letter: • Trevor Jones. Exceptionally, proper nouns can be made plural: • the Americas • There are two Susans on the staff.

Nouns can often be used as adjectives, when they sometimes form one word with another noun, or are hyphenated, or remain as two words: • postbox • tea-tray • Christmas cake. They are more likely to be hyphenated when the two nouns are used together adjectivally before a third noun: • Christmas-cake decorations • a bathroom-fittings shop.

See also HYPHEN 3.

The use of nouns as verbs has a long history. We use the verb to question without thinking that it was originally a noun. Such phrases as: • to paper a room • to tin fruit • to pencil it in are also so frequently used as to be wholly acceptable. However, more modern innovations, such as: • Let me example that for you. • They text each other every month. • He published their policies. • to modern, are disliked by many people.

See also VERBS.

noxious or obnoxious? Both these adjectives can mean 'extremely unpleasant', but obnoxious usually refers to a person and noxious to something that is physically or morally harmful: • their obnoxious children • noxious flames.

◊ Both words are ultimately derived from the Latin noxa 'injury'.

nubile The adjective nubile, derived from the Latin word for 'marriageable', is frequently applied to any sexually attractive young woman, especially in jocular or informal contexts: • His friend's nubile sister was sunbathing in the garden. Some people
object to this usage, restricting the term to its original meaning.

◆ The use of the adjective nude to describe attractive married women or unattractive unmarried women is therefore best avoided.

nuclear The occasional use of nuclear as a noun, meaning 'nuclear power';◆ a national debate about nuclear, is disliked and avoided by most people.

◆ This usage is potentially confusing, as the word nuclear may also refer to nuclear warfare, nuclear missiles, nuclear fission, nuclear energy, etc. The term nuclear winter refers to a period with very little light, heat, or growth that would follow a nuclear war.

In the phrase nuclear family the adjective nuclear simply means 'forming a nucleus.'

Nuclear is pronounced [njuˈkoʊlər] in British English and [nʌkiˈlər] in American English. It is sometimes mispronounced as if the word ended in -cular, especially in American English.

nude see NAKED or NUDE?

number The phrase a number of . . . is used with a plural verb; the phrase the number of . . . is used with a singular verb:◆ A number of pupils were late.◆ The number of pupils has increased.

See also AMOUNT or NUMBER2; SINGULAR or PLURAL2

numbers Numbers that occur in printed or written texts may be expressed in figures or written out in full, according to the nature of the work, the context, the writer's personal preference, or the publisher's house style.

◆ In mathematical, scientific, technical, commercial, or statistical texts numbers are usually expressed in figures throughout.

In other works specific measurements or sums of money, page numbers, dates, and numbers higher than one hundred (except two hundred, three hundred, four thousand, five million, etc.) are usually expressed in figures.

Some writers and publishers spell out numbers from one to ten only; some spell out numbers from one to twenty; others spell out all numbers up to one hundred. It is important to be reasonably consistent within a single piece of writing, but some users prefer not to mix figures and words in the same sentence:◆ There are nine boys and fifteen [not 15] girls in his class.◆ We invited 130 guests but only 80 [not eighty] turned up.

The time may be expressed in words or figures:◆ twenty past three • 3:20 • eight o'clock • 8 o'clock.

Times using the 24-hour clock are written as figures:◆ 16:25 • 0700 hours

See also A.M. and P.M.; DATES.

Numbers of five or more digits are separated by commas or spaces into groups of three:◆ 45,069/45 069/3,728,960/3728960. Four-digit numbers are usually printed or written without commas or spaces:◆ 5069/8960.

Some numbers have acquired their own particular semantic value:◆ We need to review the 999 (emergency) services.◆ The shop is open 24/7 (24 hours per day, 7 days per week).◆ New security measures introduced in the wake of 9/11 [the terrorist attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001].

See also DATES; HYphen 6.

nutritional or nutritious? Nutritional means 'relating to nutrition (the process of taking food into the body and absorbing it)'; nutritious means 'nourishing':◆ the nutritional requirements of a baby◆ a very nutritious meal.

◆ The adjective nutritional is increasingly used with reference to the content of processed and other foods:◆ Nutritional labelling must be made compulsory (Sunday Times).◆ People should have enough nutritional information to make dietary changes (Daily Telegraph).

The more formal adjective nutritive may be used in place of nutritional or nutritious, but it more frequently replaces the former:◆ New recommendations have been made by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for the way in which nutritive values are displayed (Kellogg's Rice Krispies packet).

nutritive see NUTRITIONAL or NUTRIENT2
O or oh? O, always written with a capital, is a rarer, more poetic variant of the exclamation oh: • O come all ye faithful. • Oh! or Oh! for the school holidays! • I can't come and see you later, I'm afraid. • Oh well, never mind. • She burst into tears, crying. 'Oh dear! Oh dear! Oh dear!' • I just thought . . . oh, never mind.

OAP see senior citizen.

Oar, or ore? These three words are occasionally confused as they are pronounced in the same way [ɔː]. Our refers to a paddle used to propel a rowing boat: • The oars dipped in the water. Or is a conjunction linking two or more alternatives: • right or wrong. Ore refers to mineral from which metals may be extracted: • iron ore.

Obesiance Obesiance is a very formal word that means an attitude or gesture of deference or respect: • to pay obesiance • to make an obesiance. It is not synonymous with obedience, although both nouns are derived from Old French obeir, 'to obey'. • Note the spelling of obesiance, particularly the ei and the -ance ending.

Object The object of a clause or sentence is the noun, pronoun, or phrase that is affected by the verb. The object usually follows the verb.

• An object may be direct or indirect. In the sentence: • The dog buried the bone, the bone is the direct object and there is no indirect object. In the sentences: • I gave the child a book and • She bought the child a book, a book is the direct object and the child is the indirect object. Many sentences that contain both a direct and an indirect object can be rephrased using the prepositions to or for: • I gave a book to the child. • She bought a book for the child.

Compare subject.

Objective or subjective? The adjective objective means 'not influenced by personal feelings, beliefs, or prejudices'; its antonym subjective means 'influenced by personal feelings, etc.': • This is a subjective opinion: I find it hard to be objective when we're discussing my own daughter's career.

• Some users consider the adjectives to be unnecessary synonyms for fair, impartial, personal, biased, etc.

The noun objective is best avoided where goal, aim, purpose, object, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • the purpose [not objective] of this meeting. • Our aim [not objective] is to provide equal opportunities for all.

Objet d'art The plural of the phrase objet d'art, meaning 'small object of artistic worth', is formed by adding -s to the first word, objet d'art.

• Of French origin, the phrase is sometimes written or printed in italics in English texts. Note the spelling of objet, which lacks the c of the English word object.

Obliged or obligated? Both these adjectives may be used in the sense of 'morally or legally bound': • He felt obligated/obliged to report the accident.

• The use of obligated is largely restricted to formal contexts.

Obligated has the additional meaning of 'physically constrained or 'compelled': • They were obligated to remain in their seats.

Oblivious The adjective oblivious is often used in the sense of 'unaware' or 'heedless': • He remained in the shelter of the tree, oblivious of the fact that the rain had stopped.

• Some people object to this usage, restricting the adjective to its original sense of 'no longer aware' or 'forgetful': • Oblivious of the need for caution, she stepped out of the car to photograph the lions.

The frequent use of the phrase oblivious to, rather than oblivious of, is unacceptable to some users and is best avoided in formal contexts: • oblivious of [not to] the dangers • oblivious of [not to] my presence.

Obnoxious see noxious or obnoxious?
obscene Some people object to the increasing use of obscene as a general term of strong disapproval: • Recent large pay awards to some company directors are obscene, the Bishop of Manchester... has told the General Synod in York (Daily Telegraph).
• The primary meaning of obscene is 'offensive to accepted standards of decency': • obscene language • an obscene picture.
• The word obscene is sometimes misspelt; note that the second syllable is identical with the word scene.

obscene

observance or observation? The noun observance denotes either the act of complying or a ritual custom or practice; observation denotes either the act of watching or noticing or a remark or comment: • observance of the rules • religious observances • their observation of human behaviour • an observation made by his client.

obverse see converse, inverse, obverse or reverse?

obviate To obviate something is to make it unnecessary or to dispose of it: • The management's new proposals obviated our complaints. It is largely restricted to formal contexts and should not be used as a pre-tentious synonym for 'remove' or 'get rid of'.
• The verb obviate is unconnected in meaning to the adjective obvious, although the two words are etymologically related.

• Some users avoid the construction obviate the need for, arguing that the need for is redundant: • A reduction in inflation would obviate the need for higher pay rises.

occasion The verb occasion is best avoided where cause, bring about, etc., would be adequate: • The accident was caused [not occasioned] by a fault in the braking system.
• Note the spelling of the word occasion, particularly the -cc- and single s.

occupied or preoccupied? Applied to a person, occupied means 'busy'; preoccupied means 'absorbed in a particular train of thought (often to the exclusion of all else)'. • I was occupied with the preparations for the carnival. • Try to keep everybody occupied. • He was preoccupied with his marital problems. • She seemed preoccupied.
• Being occupied may involve the mind and/or the body, whereas being preoccupied usually involves the mind alone.

occurrence This word is often misspelt. A frequent error is the substitution of -ance for the -ence ending. Note also the -ce- and -rr-, as also in occurred and occurring.

octopus The plural of the noun octopus, denoting a sea animal with eight tentacles, is octopuses. As the word is ultimately of Greek origin, the plural form octopi is incorrect; octopodes is permissible but pedantic.

oculist see optician, ophthalmologist, ophtalmotist or oculist?

odious or odorous? Odious means 'extremely unpleasant'; odorous, a very formal word, means 'having a particular smell': • an odious man • an odorous room. The two adjectives should not be confused.
• Like the noun odour, odorous may refer to a pleasant or an unpleasant smell. Note that the u of odour is dropped before the -ous ending of odorous.

The word odious, not odorous, is used in the saying 'Comparisons are odious'.

-oe see -ae and -oe.

oesophagus or esophagus? This word, describing the part of the alimentary canal linking the pharynx and the stomach, is spelt differently in British and American English. Oesophagus is the usual spelling in British English, while esophagus is the accepted spelling in American English.

of The preposition of is sometimes wrongly substituted for the verb have or, more frequently, its contraction 've: • They should have [not of] refused. • She must've [not must of] forgotten. • He could have [not of] tried. This substitution, caused by the similarity in pronunciation between the two words when unstressed, is wrong.
• The use of such phrases as of a Friday, of an evening, etc., in place of on Fridays, in the evening, etc., should be restricted to informal contexts: • I go shopping of a Tuesday afternoon.

See also off, 's or 's; singular or plural?

of course The phrase of course serves a number of useful purposes, but should not be used to excess.
• It has a variety of connotations, some of which may cause offence.

Used for emphasis, either alone or to introduce a reply, the phrase may convey impatience or
politeness: • 'Did you remember to post my letter?' • 'Of course I did.' • 'May I use your telephone?' • 'Of course you may.'

Used in the sense of 'naturally' or 'admittedly', it may be patronizing, superior, sympathetic, or apologetic: • It is of course impossible to communicate with the dead. • I knew his uncle, of course. I don't believe you ever met him, did you? • Of course you're tired, you've had a long journey. • I may be wrong, of course.

off The use of the preposition off in place of from, to indicate the source of an acquisition, is considered wrong by many people, even in informal contexts: • I bought it from [not off] my sister.

The phrase off of is also wrong and should be avoided in all contexts: • He jumped off [not off of] the wall. • Take your feet off [not off of] the table.

The word off is usually pronounced to rhyme with scoff; the variant pronunciation [awf] is generally considered to be old-fashioned or affected.

See also OFF-LIMITS.

offence This word, meaning 'action causing displeasure; illegal act', is sometimes misspelt. Note the -<-> not -<-> in British English (American English, offence).

The derived adjective is spelt offensive in both British and American English.

offer or proffer? Both verbs mean 'present for acceptance': • He proffered [or offered] his passport. • She offered [or proffered] her sympathy. Offer has a much wider range of usage; proffer is largely restricted to formal contexts, and should not be used as a pretentious substitute for offer.

• Proffer cannot be used in place of offer in more complex constructions: He offered [not proffered] her a glass of champagne. • They offered [not proffered] us £2000 for the car.

official or officious? The adjective official means 'authorized', 'formal', or 'of an office'; officious, which is generally used in a derogatory manner, means 'interfering', 'bossy', 'self-important', or 'offering unwanted advice or assistance': • an official strike • an official visit • an officious clerk.

The two words should not be confused.

• in the field of diplomacy the adjective officious means 'informal' or 'unofficial': • an officious agreement. This sense is not in general usage.

officialise Officialise is a derogatory name for the style of writing or language that is considered to be typical of official forms, reports, memoranda, letters, leaflets, and other bureaucratic documents.

• Known informally as gobbledygook, officialese is characterized by the use of pompous and wordy language, obscure jargon, and long unintelligible sentences. An example quoted by Tom Vernon in Gobbledygook is from a Department of Employment form: • In certain circumstances that condition may be modified to enable those persons who claim benefit early in their insurance life to treat as paid in one tax year all class 1 (standard rate) contributions paid in the period starting with the year in which they first became liable for such contributions, and ending with the day from which benefit is claimed.

Widely satirized in the media, government departments have tried in recent years, with some success, to eliminate officialese by simplifying vocabulary and circumlocutory phrases, shortening sentences, and personalizing instructions.

See also JARGON.

officious see OFFICIAL or OFFICIOUS?

off-limits The term off-limits, meaning 'out of bounds' or 'forbidden', originated in American military contexts and is now entering general British usage: • This part of the factory is off-limits to visitors. Many users prefer to retain the more traditional synonyms.

off-the-wall The adjective off-the-wall is used in informal contexts, especially in American English, to mean 'amusingly unusual; eccentric or unexpected; zany': • off-the-wall humour. Care should be taken to avoid overusing this expression.

often The words oftener and oftene are accepted comparative and superlative forms of the adverb often, but many users prefer more often and most often, especially in informal contexts: • It rains most often in the autumn. • Which car do you use oftener?

• The t of often is rarely sounded, the most frequent pronunciation of the word being [oðen]. The pronunciation [often] is heard from time to time, but the variant [awℓen], which sounds like orphan, is generally considered to be old-fashioned or affected.

oh see O or OH?

OK or okay? The term OK or okay, denoting agreement or approval, may be used as an adjective, adverb, noun, or verb: • That's OK. • The meeting went OK. • He's given
one often talks to himself. • One should be kind to his friends.

When the pronoun one represents a specific person it is always followed by his, her, etc.: • The twins' tastes are not identical: one drinks her coffee black, the other drinks it white.

In formal contexts the impersonal pronoun one is generally preferred to you. The use of one in place of I or we, however, is widely considered to be acceptable and is best avoided, especially in informal contexts: • I have [not One has] never been very good at sport. • We hope [not One hopes] that the situation will improve.

See also YOU.

The constructions one in three/five/ten/ etc. and one of the . . ., followed by a plural noun, should be used with a singular verb: • One in four teachers is in favour of corporal punishment. • One of the eggs is broken. However, a plural verb is often seen or heard after the construction one in . . .: • One in ten men are thought to have a drink problem (BBC radio news). The constructions one of those . . . who and one of the . . . that are followed by a plural verb: • He is one of those people who are never satisfied. • It is one of the shortest books that have ever been published.

See also SINGULAR or PLURAL?

In some contexts the word one is superfluous: • His smile was not a friendly one, for example, may be more concisely expressed as: His smile was not friendly.

See also EACH OTHER or ONE ANOTHER?

onerous This word, meaning 'demanding or troublesome': • onerous tasks, has two acceptable pronunciations, [onərəs] and [ənərəs].

one-stop The term one-stop refers to the modern trend towards combining various related facilities or services in one place or package: • a one-stop system • The report . . . suggests local authorities can offer 'one-stop shops' where employers can find child-care, training and other contacts under one roof (Daily Telegraph). It is a vogue word disliked by some people.

• One-stop shopping originally referred to shops that sell a wide range of essential items – food, newspapers, books, toys, clothes, gardening and household goods, etc.

ongoing Many people object to the use of the adjective ongoing in place of continuing, developing, in progress, etc.: • ongoing research • an ongoing investment programme in manufacturing technology. The cliché ongoing situation is also widely disliked.
on-line

- The word ongoing sometimes appears in hyphenated form: • We put you through the world's most advanced management training courses followed by on-going personal development (Executive Post).

**on-line** The term *on-line*, which relates to equipment that is directly connected to and/or controlled by a central computer, is sometimes used in the extended sense of 'in direct communication with': • *on-line to the president* It should not be confused with **ON-STREAM** • *Rent A Film . . . will be getting in the party spirit to celebrate a very special service which has just come on line at their plush, newly-refurbished premises* (Littlehampton Guardian).

- The phrase *on-line* often refers specifically to being connected to the internet: • *is your computer on-line yet?* • *I haven't gone on-line yet today*. When used as an attributive adjective the phrase is usually spelt as one word: • *Let me tell you about our online services.*

**only** In some written sentences the adverb *only* must be carefully positioned, as near as possible to the word it refers to, in order to convey the intended meaning: • *She eats fish only on Fridays* [i.e. not other days]. • *She eats only fish [i.e. nothing else] on Fridays.* • *Only she* [i.e. She is the only one who] *eats fish on Fridays.*

- In speech, where the stress and intonation of the sentence should eliminate any ambiguity, and in written sentences that are not open to misinterpretation, only may be placed in its most idiomatic position, i.e. between the subject and the verb or between an auxiliary verb and a main verb: • He only needs one more to complete the collection. • They have only sold three books.

The use of only as a conjunction, in place of but or however, is best restricted to informal contexts: • *I'd like to go to Canada, only I can't afford the air fare.*

- Some people object to the use of the phrase *only too* as an intensifier, reserving it for the sense of 'regrettably': • *I am very [not only too] pleased to help.* • The new container, which is supposed to be chipproof, is only too easy to open.

See also: **NOT ONLY . . . BUT ALSO.**

**onomatopoeia** Onomatopoeia is the formation of words that imitate the sound associated with an object or action: • *cuckoo* • *moo* • *clang* • *cough* • *his* • *twitter.*

- It also refers to the use of words, usually in poetry, in such a way as to suggest the sound described. An example is: Keeping time, time, time, in a sort of Runic rhyme, To the intimation that so musically wells From the bells, bells, bells, bells. (Edgar Allan Poe, The Bells)

**on-stream** The term *on-stream* relates to an industrial process or plant that is in production or about to go into production or operation or to the launching of a new advertising campaign, etc.: • *The rest of the country should be on-stream by the end of 2005.*

- It is sometimes possible to replace the phrase *come on-stream* with open, begin, etc.

The hyphen is often omitted when *on-stream* is employed as an attributive adjective: • *An on-stream date of 2010 is proposed.*

**onto** or **on to?** The preposition *onto* may be written as one or two words: • *She drove onto/on the pavement*. On to may also be a combination of the adverb *on* and the preposition or infinitive marker *to*, in which case it should not be written as one word: • *She drove on to London*. • *She drove on to find a hotel.*

**onward** or **onwards?** In British English *onward* is principally used as an adjective, *onwards* being the usual form of the adverb meaning 'ahead': • *Onward motion* • *to march onwards.*

- The adverb *onward* is more frequently used in American English.

See also: **-WARD** or **-WARDS**

**operative** The frequent use of the noun *operative* in place of *worker*, especially in nonindustrial contexts, is disliked by many users: • *a strike by cleaning operatives at the hospital.*

**ophthalmologist** See: **OPHTHALMOLOGIST, OPTOMETRIST or OCULIST?**

**opposite** The noun *opposite* is followed by of, not to: • *Hot is the opposite of [not to] cold.* As a preposition, *opposite* may be followed by to (not of) but usually stands alone: • *the car park opposite (to) the station.*

- The adjectival opposite may be used with to or from: • *He sat on the opposite side to her.*

**oppress, repress** or **suppress?** These verbs are similar in meaning; all three refer to subjugation or restraint. *Oppress* means
'subjugate by force, cruel treatment, etc.; the direct object of the verb is usually a group of people • a regime that oppresses women • the oppressed workers. The verb repress is also used in this sense, but more frequently refers to the act of concealing or controlling one's feelings: • I repressed the urge to hit him. • a repressed desire. In psychology, repress means 'banish or exclude (thoughts, feelings, etc.) from one's conscious mind or awareness', an act that may lead to psychological problems: • repressed sexuality. The verb suppress has the more general meaning of 'restrain' or 'control': • She couldn't suppress her laughter. Suppress also means 'withhold' or 'crush': • to suppress information • to suppress a rebellion.

Note the differences in spelling, particularly the -pp- of oppress and suppress and the single -p- of repress.

optician, ophthalmologist, optometrist or oculist? All four nouns denote people who are concerned with defects or diseases of the eyes.

The word optician, which is probably the most familiar, may denote an ophthalmic optician or a dispensing optician.

An ophthalmic optician is qualified to test eyesight and prescribe corrective lenses. A dispensing optician makes and sells glasses (and other optical equipment).

An ophthalmologist is a doctor who specializes in eye diseases. Optometrist is a less frequent name for an ophthalmic optician; oculist is synonymous with ophthalmologist.

The word ophthalmologist is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent error being the omission of the first h. It is usually pronounced [ofθ'mælədʒist]; the pronunciation of the first syllable to rhyme with hop, rather than scoff, is disliked by many users.

optimal see optimum.

optimistic Many people object to the frequent use of the adjective optimistic as a synonym for 'hopeful', 'confident', 'cheerful', 'favourable', 'encouraging', etc.: • She is optimistic that the car will be found. • They have produced an optimistic report on the company's prospects.

In general usage optimistic principally relates to a tendency to see or expect the best or to take a favourable view of things: • Throughout his illness he remained optimistic.

optimize see optimum.

optimum The adjective and noun optimum refer to the most favourable or advantageous condition, amount, degree, etc.: • the optimum speed • A temperature of 15°C is the optimum.

The noun optimum has two plural forms, usually in technical contexts, optimums and optima.

The frequent use of the adjective optimum and its synonym optimal in the sense of 'best' is disliked by many users: • a manufacturing programme designed to make optimum use of all available resources (Executive Post). • A combination of olive oil and butter will produce the optimum result.

The verb optimize means 'make the most of' or 'make as efficient as possible': • to optimize the potential of the business • to optimize the production process.

opt in see opt out.

optometrist see optician, ophthalmologist, optometrist or oculist?

opt out Opt out means 'choose not to participate or be involved', with the implication that a person or organization that does not opt out is automatically included: • to opt out of society • schools that have opted out (of local government control). In the opposite situation, where people or organizations are automatically excluded unless they choose to participate, the verb opt in may be used: • A survey into public attitudes to kidney donation found that most people are willing to donate their kidneys but they are against a scheme to 'opt out' of donation rather than the present scheme of 'opting in' (New Scientist).

opus The formal noun opus, denoting a musical work or other artistic composition, may be pronounced [ʌpəs], with the long o of open, or [əpəs], with the short o of operate. Both pronunciations are acceptable, but the first is more frequent.

Opus also has two plural forms, opuses and operas. As the word opera exists as a singular noun in its own right, some users prefer opuses: the phrase Mozart's opera, for example, may refer to a single operatic composition or to all Mozart's musical works.

or When or connects two or more singular subjects a singular verb is used: • Perhaps Peter or Jane knows [not know] the answer. A plural verb is used if both subjects are plural: • Carrots or parsnips are served with this dish.
oral

in a combination of singular and plural alternatives the verb traditionally agrees with the subject that is nearest to it: • one large pot or two small ones are needed. • two small pots or one large one is needed. The same principle is applied to singular subjects that are used with different forms of the verb: • are you or your wife going to the concert? if the resulting sentence sounds inelegant or undomatic, a second verb may be added: • am i the winner or is he?

the use of or at the beginning of a sentence is generally acceptable: • we may go to london tomorrow. or we may stay at home.

for the use of a comma before or in a series of three or more items see comma 1. or may also be preceded by a comma in other contexts, especially if it introduces a synonym rather than an alternative: • the policy of glasnost or openness.

see also and/or, either, nor, oar, or or one?
oral see aural or oral?; versal or oral?
ordinance or ordnance? an ordinance is a decree or regulation; the noun ordinance denotes military supplies or artillery.
• neither word is in frequent use; ordinance is largely restricted to local government contexts; ordnance is chiefly associated with ordnance survey maps.

the similarity in spelling often leads to confusion between the two words.
ore see oar or ore?
organic the adjective organic is applied to methods of food production that do not make use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, etc.; • organic farming • organically produced fruit. some people dislike the increasing tendency to apply the adjective directly to the produce itself: • organic food • organic vegetables.
• this objection is based on the fact that all meat, fruit, and vegetables may be described as organic in the principal sense of ‘relating to or derived from living plants or animals’.
orient or orientate? both forms of the verb are acceptable: orient, the standard form in american english, is preferred by some users as the shorter and simpler alternative, but orientate is the more frequent in british english.
• to orient originally meant ‘to face east’; the variant orientate was probably a backformation from the noun orientation. the verb is often used reflexively, meaning ‘get one’s bearings’ or ‘adjust oneself to new surroundings’: • they found it difficult to orient/orientate themselves in the unfamiliar town.

the past participle is increasingly used in the sense of ‘inclined towards’: • a commercially orientated service • a science-oriented course. many people dislike this usage, which is generally avoidable and often quite superfluous; examples include the local government service designed to meet locality-oriented needs rather than ‘to meet the needs of the locality’ and job advertisements that call for experience in product-oriented development (product development) or engineering-oriented environments (engineering).

see also disorient or disorientate?
oriental the use of oriental as a noun describing a person from one of the countries of east asia is no longer considered acceptable. the preferred modern alternative is south-east asian.
orthopaedic or paediatric? both these adjectives are used in medical contexts and they are often confused. orthopaedic refers to the treatment of bones, joints, muscles, etc.; paediatric refers to the treatment of children.
• the -paed- element in both words is derived from the greek word for ‘child’; an orthopaedic specialist was originally concerned with the bones, joints, etc., of children but now treats people of all ages. note that there is no connection with the ped- element of pedestrian and pedal, which is derived from the latin word for ‘foot’.

in american english the -ae- of orthopaedic and paediatric is reduced to -e- (see also -ae- and -oe-).
oscillate or oscillate? to oscillate means ‘move from one position, mood, or value to another; fluctuate or swing’: • the value of the pound oscillated between 1.50 and 1.70 US dollars. • his moods oscillated between anger and indifference. Oscillate is a much rarer word mainly used in humorous contexts to mean ‘to kiss’.

ostensible or ostentatious? ostensible means ‘apparent’; ostentatious means ‘showy’: • the ostensible reason for her absence • an ostentatious display of grief.
• both adjectives are ultimately derived from the latin verb ostendere, meaning ‘show’, and neither is complimentary: ostensible has connotations of falseness or deception; ostentatious suggests pretentiousness or vulgarity.
other than The use of other than as an adverbial phrase is disliked by some users: • They were unable to escape other than by squeezing through the narrow window. ♦ Its adjectival use, however, is acceptable to all: • There was no means of escape other than the narrow window.

Other than is best avoided where apart from would be more appropriate: • There was a narrow window apart from [not other than] that, there was no means of escape.

The construction other . . . than should not be replaced by other . . . but or other . . . except: • He had no other friend than [not but] me. ♦ Every other card than [not except] yours arrived on time.

If the word other is omitted, however, but or except may be substituted for than.

otherwise Some people object to the frequent use of otherwise as an adverb or pronoun: • All essays, finished or otherwise, must be handed in tomorrow morning. ♦ The entire workforce, union members and otherwise, went on strike. Otherwise may be replaced by not in the first of these examples and by others in the second.

♦ The use of otherwise in combination with an adverb is acceptable to all: • The window was broken, accidentally or otherwise, by one of your children.

In the sense of 'or else', otherwise should not be preceded by or: • Turn the volume down, otherwise you'll wake the baby.

OTT see OVER THE TOP.

ought The auxiliary verb ought, expressing duty, obligation, advisability, expectation, etc., is always followed by an infinitive with to: • They ought to visit her more often. ♦ Ought we to have invited your sister? • You oughtn't to leave your car unlocked. ♦ The meat ought to be cooked by now.

♦ The negative and interrogative forms didn't ought to, hadn't ought to, did you ought to, had I ought to, etc., are regarded as wrong by careful users.

Ought to can occasionally be replaced by should: • The meat should be cooked by now.

In most contexts, however, ought expresses a stronger sense of duty, obligation, advisability, etc., than should.

See also SHOULD or WOULD?

OUR see HOUR or OUR?

OUR or US? see -ING FORMS.

ourselves or ourselves? When referring to people in general or to an individual person, the singular pronoun ourselves is occasionally used in preference to the plural form ourselves: • We can decide that for ourselves. • 'Oh dear, have we hurt ourselves?' she said to the child. This is not incorrect, but ourselves is the safer option in most contexts.

out The verb out, meaning 'expose the homosexuality of', is a relatively recent coinage derived from the phrase come out (of the closet), meaning 'reveal one's homosexuality': • The militant gay group which threatened to 'out' MPs and other leading figures for not declaring their homosexuality . . . said it was all a hoax (The Guardian).

♦ The verb out and its associated noun outing are increasingly used in other contexts: • Indiscriminate 'outings' of people alleged to have collaborated with the former communist secret police prompted Mr Havel to announce that he himself had been listed as a 'candidate for collaboration' in 1965 (The Guardian).

out or out of? In recent years the prepositional phrase out of has been reduced with increasing frequency to out: • He stormed out the door. ♦ She looked out the window. This tendency is disliked by many people and is best restricted to very informal contexts.

outdoor or outdoors? Outdoor is an adjective, outdoors is an adverb: • outdoor sports • outdoor pursuits: to play outdoors ♦ Outdoor clothes are worn outdoors.

♦ The word outdoors is also used as a noun: • the great outdoors.

outing see OUT.

outlet Some people object to the frequent use of the noun outlet in place of shop: • The product is available at a number of retail outlets in London.

♦ In commercial contexts outlet also means 'market': • The company has yet to find outlets for its solar-powered torches.

out of see OUT or OUT OF?

outplacement The noun outplacement refers to advice and assistance given to people who have been made redundant (or who are about to be made redundant): • outplacement counselling • outplacement consulting.
outrageous

- The use of the noun outplacement as a euphemism for 'making redundant' is best avoided.

outrageous This word, meaning 'shocking or unconventional'; *outrageous manners*, is sometimes misspelt. The e of outrage is retained before the suffix -eous to indicate the softness of the g.

outside of Many people dislike the prepositional phrase outside of, in which the word of is incorrect. The phrase is best avoided in formal contexts: *There was a taxi outside [not outside of] the house.*
- The addition of this superfluous of to the preposition outside may be influenced by the prepositional phrase out of or by the phrase on the outside, which is followed by of when it is used prepositionally: *a label on the outside of the box.*

outward or outwards? In British English outward is principally used as an adjective, outwards being the usual form of the adverb meaning 'towards the outside': *the outward journey.* *to pull outwards.*
- The adverb outward is more frequently used in American English.

See also -WARD or -WARDS?

over see ABOVE or OVER?

overall The word overall is best avoided where total, whole, comprehensive, general, average, inclusive, altogether, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: *his general [not overall] appearance* • the total [not overall] cost of the project. *The journey will take five days altogether [not overall].*

- in some contexts overall is superfluous; an overall increase in production.

The use of the word overall in its original sense of 'from end to end' is acceptable to all users: *the overall length of the room.*

overexaggerate Careful users avoid this emphatic form of exaggerate on the grounds that the prefix over- is redundant: *The importance of this development cannot be overexaggerated.*

overkill The frequent use of the noun overkill in the sense of 'excess' is disliked by some users: *In the coverage of the election the media have been accused of overkill.*
- The noun is particularly undesirable in contexts that may be associated with the literal meaning of the verb kill: *We must avoid overkill in the presentation of our anti-abortion campaign.*

The term overkill originally denoted a greater capacity than necessary for destruction, with specific reference to nuclear weapons: *The de-escalation of the arms race has reduced the problem of overkill.*

overlay or overlie? Both verbs are used transitively: overlay has the past tense and past participle overlaid; overlie has the past tense overlaid and the past participle overlain.
- Overlay means 'cover or superimpose', and is often used in the passive: • floorboards overlaid with old rugs; • the atmosphere was overlaid with a sense of nostalgia. Either overlay or overlie is used in the sense of 'cause the death of, by lying on': *The saw overlay the piglet.*

Overlie is used less frequently and means 'lie over or upon': *rocks overlain by alluvial deposits.*

overly Many people object to the use of the adverb overly in place of too, excessively, etc.:
- She was not overly enthusiastic about my idea. *He is overly sensitive to the slightest criticism.*
- In some contexts the need for overly can be obviated by attaching the prefix over- with or without a hyphen, to the relevant adjective: *overenthusiastic* *oversensitive.*

over the top The cliché over the top and its slang abbreviation OTT, meaning 'excessive' or 'outrageous', should not be overused: *The restaurant sketch was a bit OTT.*

overtone or undertone? In the figurative sense of 'implied shade of meaning or feeling', these two nouns are virtually synonymous, although overtone may convey an additional effect and undertone an underlying effect. Both are more frequently used in the plural: *overtones of malice* **undertones of discontent** *political overtones* *religious undertones.*
- The words are not interchangeable in their other meanings: overtone is a technical term in music and undertone denotes a hushed voice: *to speak in an undertone.*

overview The noun overview is best avoided where survey, summary, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: *a general overview of the situation.*

owing see DUE TO, OWING TO or BECAUSE OF?

oxymoron An oxymoron is a phrase in which two apparently contradictory words are combined: *a cowardly hero* *cruelly kind.*
pace The Latin word pace, usually printed in italics, means 'with due respect' and is used when stating an opinion contrary to that of the specified person: • The teaching profession, pace George Bernard Shaw, is not a refuge for those who cannot do anything else.

• Pace is a two-syllable word with at least two accepted pronunciations, [pās] and [pach]. Since the word is largely restricted to formal written contexts, the problem of pronunciation does not frequently arise.

package The word package and the expression package deal are widely used to denote a set of proposals or offers that must be accepted or rejected as a whole: • a new package of measures dealing with pay and working conditions.

• In other contexts package is often better omitted or replaced by a more appropriate noun: • Japan's recent announcement of a substantial package of extra spending (Sunday Times). • Hannick's has spent over £100,000 on a retail design package (The Bookseller).

Some people also object to the frequent use of the verb package in place of present: • the different ways in which the major political parties were packaged during the election campaign.

paediatric see ORTHOPAEDIC or PAEDIATRIC?

pain or pane? These two words are occasionally confused since they are pronounced the same. Pain means 'acute physical or mental discomfort': • The morphine should stop the pain. • Her remarks caused him great pain. The word pane refers to a sheet of glass or other material: • The explosion broke three panes of glass.

pajamas see PYJAMAS or PAJAMAS?

palate This word, meaning 'the top part of the inside of one's mouth' or 'sense of taste': • a cleft palate • He has a sensitive palate, is sometimes misspelt. It should not be confused with palette, the board on which an artist mixes colours, or pallet, a flat plat-

form used in stacking and moving stored goods, and also a hard bed or straw mattress.

palindrome A palindrome is a word, phrase, or sentence that reads the same whether read forwards or backwards. Examples include such words as noon and madam, such names as Anna and Hannah and, more ambitiously, such phrases as 'Able was I ere I saw Elba' (supposedly said by the exiled Napoleon).

pallor The noun pallor, meaning 'paleness', is sometimes misspelt. Note the final -or, as in stupor, rather than -our.

palpable The use of the adjective palpable in the extended sense of 'easily perceived', in place of obvious, manifest, plain, etc., is disliked by some people: • a palpable lie.

• Derived from the Latin verb palpare, meaning 'touch', palpable was originally restricted to what could be touched or felt: • palpable warmth.

panacea The noun panacea denotes a universal remedy for all ills; it should not be used with reference to individual problems or troubles: • Efficient use of energy saves money but is not a panacea for solving carbon dioxide pollution (Daily Telegraph).

• Often used disparagingly, the word is more frequently found in figurative contexts than in its literal sense of 'cure-all'.

Note the spelling of panacea, which is derived from the prefix pan-, meaning 'all', and the Greek word for 'cure'. It is pronounced [pānāˈsēə]?

pane see PAIN or PAN?

panic The word panic adds a k before the suffix -ic and suffixes beginning with an i or e such as -ed, -er, and -ing: • panicist • They panicked. • Stop panicking!

See also SPELLING 1.

paparazzi This term, referring to freelance photographers who specialize in taking unguarded shots of celebrities to sell to
paradigm

newspapers, is often misspelt. Note particularly the single -p- in the middle of the word and the second -d-.

paradigm The noun paradigm is best avoided where example, model, pattern, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • a paradigm of enterprise and initiative • a paradigm of the problems faced by the unemployed.

Paradigm specifically denotes a clear or typical example; it should not be confused with the noun paragon, meaning ‘model of excellence’. The word is often encountered in the phrase paradigm shift, which describes a fundamental change of direction or in underlying attitudes, etc.

The g of paradigm, pronounced [parədɪɡm], is silent. In the adjective paradigmatic, pronounced [parədɪɡmatɪk], the g is sounded.

paraffin This word is sometimes misspelt. Note the single r and -ff-, as in raffle.

paragons A subdivision of a written passage, which usually deals with one particular point or theme. It expresses an idea which, though it relates to the sense of the whole passage, can to some extent stand alone.

There is no specified length for a paragraph, it can be one sentence or over a page long. However, very short successive paragraphs, as found in advertisements and popular journalism, can have a rather disjointed effect, while very long paragraphs can give the impression of heavy material that can be read through only in a slow, laborious manner. The most effective writing usually mixes longer and shorter paragraphs.

A paragraph starts on a new line and is usually indented in a passage of dialogue each act of speech normally starts a new paragraph.

parallel This word is sometimes misspelt. Note the single r, -ll-, and then the single l.

The spelling of some derived forms and compounds varies: • parallelly or parallelly • paralleled or paralleled • parallelism • parallelogram • unparalleled.

paralyse This word is sometimes misspelt. The spelling in British English is paralyse [not -yse], in American English, paralyze.

See also -ize or -ise?

parameter Many people object to the frequent use of the noun parameter, a mathematical term, as a synonym for ‘limit’, ‘boundary’, ‘framework’, ‘characteristic’, or ‘point to be considered’: • A business must operate within the parameters of time, money, and efficiency. • We keep on refining our mailing selection parameters (The Bookseller). • What are the parameters of the problem?

Note the pronunciation of parameter, which is stressed on the second syllable [pərəˈmərtər].

Care should be taken not to confuse parameter with perimeter, which means ‘boundary’ or ‘outer edge’: • Guards were posted along the perimeter.

paranoid The adjective paranoid principally relates to a mental disorder (paranoia) characterized by delusions of persecution or grandeur: • Often, he [a schizophrenic] feels himself to be persecuted – a paranoid delusion that occasionally leads to violence (Reader’s Digest).

Some people object to the frequent use of paranoid and paranoia with reference to any intense suspicion, distrust, anxiety, fear, obsession, etc.: • It gives me an interest-free overdraft of £250 so I don’t have to get paranoid at the end of the month (advertisement, Sunday Times).

The word paranoid is also used as a noun, although this may cause offence. Its synonym paranoiac, pronounced [pərəˈnɔʊɪk] or [pərəˈnɔɪək], is less frequent.

Note the spelling of paranoia, particularly the last three vowels.

paraphernalia The noun paraphernalia, sometimes used with derogatory connotations, denotes all the miscellaneous items associated with a particular activity: • the paraphernalia of photography. It is also used in more abstract contexts: • the paraphernalia of buying a new house. Paraphernalia is a plural noun, but it is frequently used with a singular verb: • His camping paraphernalia is stored in the attic. This usage is generally acceptable.

Note the spelling of the word, particularly the unstressed syllable -phera-.

parentheses see BRACKETS.

parenting The word parenting, which means ‘being a parent’ or ‘parental care’, is increasingly used to emphasize the joint responsibility of both parents in all aspects of a child’s upbringing and to avoid the
sexual stereotypes and traditional roles associated with the words mother and father and their derivatives: • the advantage of shared parenting • a guide to parenting the gifted child.

• This expression is disliked by those who object to the use of nouns as verbs.

par excellence The French expression par excellence is used to refer to a person or thing that is better than all others of its kind: • He is a news reporter par excellence.

• Note that the expression par excellence comes after the noun to which it refers and is sometimes written or printed in italics. Its Anglicized pronunciation is [par ekselekn].

parliament The noun parliament, meaning 'legislative authority, assembly, or body', is usually written with a capital P when it denotes a specific parliament, especially that of the United Kingdom: • The issue will be debated in Parliament this afternoon.

• The usual pronunciation of parliament is [parliamənt]; the pronunciations [parliament] and [parlia-ment] are accepted variants. Note the spelling of the word, particularly the central vowels.

parlour see lounge.

part and parcel The phrase part and parcel, meaning 'included as an essential aspect of something else', is sometimes rendered incorrectly as part and partial: • Physical exhaustion is all part and parcel of being a top athlete.

partly or partly Both adverbs mean 'not completely' or 'to some extent', but there are differences of sense, usage, and application between them: • facilities for the blind and partially sighted • The course consists partly of oral work and partly of written work.

• in some contexts the two adverbs are virtually interchangeable: • a partly/partially successful attempt. It can be helpful to think of partly as meaning 'concerning one part; not wholly': • The woman's face was partly hidden [i.e. only part of her face was hidden] by her veil. • The art treasures were partly on permanent loan to the museum and partly in the possession of the Adams family. Partially may then be used to mean 'to a limited extent; not completely': • The woman's face was partially hidden [i.e. her whole face may have been hidden but to a limited degree] by her veil. • His hopes were partially frustrated by the lack of full commitment by his fellow workers.

• However, in actual usage such guidelines tend to be ignored, and the words are used interchangeably, with partly being the more frequent. The H.M. Customs & Excise VAT notice on Partial Exemption (1980), for example, describes those registered for VAT as partly exempt, even though the notice is titled Partial Exemption.

participle All verbs have present participles, which are formed with -ing: • seeing • walking, and past participles, formed with -ed or -en for regular verbs and in other ways for irregular verbs: loved • finished • given • gone • thought.

• Participles are often used as adjectives: • broken promises • a leaking tap. They are also used, with an inversion of the usual sentence construction, to introduce a sentence such as: • Sitting in the corner was an old man. • Attached to his wrist was a luggage label. Care should be taken with such introductory participles, as they are sometimes used to link items that are quite unrelated: see dangour participles.

• The pronunciation most frequently used is [part-1ɪs]; [partɪs] is an older variant.

• See also stress.

• See also -ed or -en? -ing forms. For irregular parts of verbs see table at verbs.

particular Used for emphasis, the adjective particular is often superfluous: • Do you have any particular preference? • This particular dress was worn by Vivien Leigh in 'Gone with the Wind'.

• Many people dislike this usage, reserving the adjective for what is exceptional, special, specific, or worthy of note: • This discovery is of particular importance.

partly see partly or partly?

passed or past? These spellings are sometimes confused. Passed is the past tense and past participle of past: • We passed the station. • The years have passed by so quickly.

• Past is used for all other forms: noun, adjective, preposition, and adverb: • Your past is catching up with you. • the past weeks •擅长 past the sign. • It's five past three. • The plane flew past.

passive A passive verb is one in which the subject receives the action of the verb (compare active). The sentence • The play was written by Oscar Wilde contains the passive verb was written.

• The subject of a passive verb is the direct object
of the verb in a corresponding active sense. The subject of the above example, the play, is the direct object of the active equivalent Oscar Wilde wrote the play.

A passive verb is usually formed from part of the verb by a past participle: • The woman was struck on the head. • The house had been demolished.

Many users prefer to replace a passive clause or sentence with its simpler active equivalent, but this is not always possible. One cannot convert the two examples in the previous paragraph into the active unless one knows who or what struck the woman and demolished the house.

past see PASSED or PAST?

patent This word may be pronounced [ˈpætənt] in all senses in British English:
• to patent/apply for a patent for a new invention • patent leather shoes, and as the adverb patently [ˈpætəntli]; • It is patently obvious she's lying.

In legal and official contexts, in the noun and verb senses of the word, (obtaining) the official rights to a product, patent is usually pronounced [ˈpɑːtənt].

In American English [ˈpætənt] is used for all senses.

pathetic The use of the adjective pathetic in the derogatory sense of ‘contemptible’ or ‘worthless’ is best restricted to informal contexts: • The comedian made a pathetic attempt to mimic the president. • Don't be so pathetic!

• The principal sense of pathetic is ‘arousing pity or sorrow’: • The sick child made several pathetic attempts to stand up.

pathos see BATHOS or PATHOS?

patriot This word, meaning ‘one who loves his or her country’, has two acceptable pronunciations [ˈpætriət] or [ˈpætriət].

patron see CUSTOMER or CUSTOMER?

pay- The prefix pay- has been adopted in a wide range of contexts in recent years in reference to payment for services at the time they are received: • pay-as-you-go • pay-per-view • pay-per-listen. Care should be taken not to overuse the prefix, especially in contexts where is is unnecessary or inappropriate.

PC see POLITICAL CORRECTNESS.

PE see AD and BC.

peaceable or peaceful? The adjective peaceable, meaning ‘disposed to peace’, ‘peace-loving’, or ‘not aggressive’, is principally applied to people: • the peaceable inhabitants of the town • a peaceable temperament. Peaceful, the more frequent of the two adjectives, means ‘characterized by peace’, ‘calm’, or ‘not violent’: • a peaceful scene • a peaceful demonstration • peaceful coexistence.

• Note the spelling of peaceable, particularly the second e (see also SPELLING 3).

peak, peek, or pique? These three words are occasionally confused since they are all pronounced in the same way [peɪk]. Peak refers variously to a mountain, summit, or cap brim or, as a verb, to the action of reaching a high point: • The climbers reached the peak around noon. • The storm peaked around midnight. • He tapped the peak of his cap with his forefinger. It should not be confused with peck, which denotes a brief glimpse: • He could not resist a quick peek at the menu, or with pique, which means ‘resentment’ or ‘hurt pride’: • He changed his mind in a fit of pique.

peal or peel? These two words are pronounced in the same way but have different meanings. Peal refers to the sound of bells ringing: • the peal of church bells or a long loud sound • a peal of distant thunder • peals of laughter. Peel as a noun refers to the skin of a fruit: • orange peel, and as a verb means ‘remove the skin of a vegetable or piece of fruit’: • to peel the potatoes.

pecadillo The spelling of this word, which means ‘a small, unimportant offence’, may cause difficulty. Note the -ce-, single -d-, and -ll-.

• The plural is either pecadillos or pecadillos. The word derives from Spanish pecadillo, diminutive of pecado ‘sin’.

pedal or pedal? The word pedal relates to a foot-operated lever: • the soft pedal on a piano • a pedal bin • to pedal a bicycle. To pedal is to sell small articles or illegal goods, such as drugs, or to put forward ideas or information: • to pedal brushes/ heroin/gossip. The two verbs should not be confused.

• The verb peddle is a BACK FORMATION from the
noun pedlar, denoting a person who goes from place to place selling goods. In other senses of the verb peddle the spelling peddler is often used in place of pedlar. • a drug peddler • a peddler of ideas. In American English peddler is preferred for all senses; in British English pedlar is usually retained in its original sense. Note the single d and the -or ending of pedlar.

In British English the final / of the verb peddle is doubled before a suffix beginning with a vowel: peddled, peddling. The American spellings are pedaled, pedaling, etc.

See also SPELLING 1.

pedigree The noun pedigree denotes an ancestral line or line of descent, specifically that of a purebred animal; its use as a synonym for 'record' or 'background' is disliked by some users: a pedigree of success spanning over 50 years in the radio and television rental and retail field (Executive Post).

pedlar see PEDAL or PEDDLE?

peek see PEAK, PEEK or PIQUE?

peer see PEAL or PEEL?

peer or pier? Peer variously means 'equal', 'member of the nobility', or, as a verb, 'take a close look at someone or something': He was much admired by his peers. • a peer of the realm. • He peered at the signature. It should not be confused with pier, which refers to a jetty or platform on stilts: There were two boats tied up at the pier.

pejorative This word, meaning 'disparaging', can be pronounced in two ways. The pronunciation [pjərərəv] is used more frequently than the more traditional [pərərəv].

pence As pence is one of the plural forms of the noun penny, many people object to the use of the term one-pence piece to denote a penny coin: Does the machine still take one-pence pieces? The plural noun pennies is used with reference to a number of coins, whereas pence usually refers to a sum of money: My purse is full of pennies. • The envelopes cost fifteen pence each. • Can you give me ten pennies in exchange for a ten-pence piece?

After the decimalization of British currency in 1971 the abbreviation p, pronounced [pee], was often used in speech to distinguish between old and new pennies or pence. This usage has continued, but is best restricted to informal contexts: • Can you lend me twenty p?

The pronunciation of the word pence was also affected by decimalization; the sum of 6d was pronounced [sikspens], with the stress on the first syllable, whereas 6p is usually pronounced [sjiks-pens], with equal stress on both syllables.

penchant The noun penchant, meaning 'inclination' or 'hiking', is of French origin and is pronounced [pəntʃən], an Anglicized form of the French pronunciation, in British English.

pendant or pendent? The noun pendant, denoting a type of necklace, has the rare variant spelling pendent. The word pendent is also used as an adjective, in the sense of 'hanging', with the (less frequent) variant spelling pendant.

peninsula or peninsular? These two spellings are sometimes confused. A peninsula is a long narrow section of land that is almost surrounded by water but which in fact is joined to the mainland. The adjective is peninsular: the Peninsular War of 1808 to 1814.

pennies, penny see PENCE.

pensioner see SENIOR CITIZEN or OLD AGE PENSIIONER?

people People is usually a plural noun, but in the sense of 'nation', 'race', or 'tribe' it may be singular or plural: a nomadic people of Africa, all the peoples of the world. The French people are renowned for their culinary expertise. The use of the alternative plural form persons to denote a number of human beings is best restricted to formal contexts: no more than eight persons may use the lift. • There are four people [not persons] in the waiting room.

With reference to a group or body of human beings, the word people is preferred in all contexts: • a meeting place for young people, • representatives of the people.

Note that the possessive of people when referring to a single group or people in general is formed by adding s: He is the people's favourite. When referring to several groups or nations the possessive is formed by adding s': an oppressed peoples' organization.

people with disabilities This is the pre-
ferred modern term for people with physical or mental disabilities, replacing such former terms as handicapped and retarded: • The building has been specifically designed to meet the needs of people with disabilities.
See also DISABLED.

per The preposition per, meaning 'for each' or 'in each', is often better replaced by a or an: • four times a [not per] month • 60p [not per] metre. In some contexts, however, per must be retained: • Use two ounces of cheese per person. • The left-luggage attendant charges one pound per item per day.
• Many people consider the use of per in place of by to be excessively formal or affected: • The parcel will be sent per Securicor.
See also AS PER: PER ANNUM: PER CAPITA: PER CENT: PER SE.

per-, pre- or pro- These three prefixes sometimes cause confusion in the spelling and usage of certain pairs of words.
• See PERSECRATE or PROSECUTE?: PERSPECTIVE or PROSPECTIVE?: PRECEDE or PROCEED?: PREREQUISITE or PROSPECT?: PRESCRIBE or PROSCRIBE?

per annum The Latin phrase per annum, meaning 'for each year', is best restricted to formal contexts: • You will be paid a salary of £12,000 per annum.
• In other contexts the more informal phrase a year is preferred: • It costs several hundred pounds a year, excluding petrol, to keep this car on the road.
See also PER.

per capita The adverbial or adjectival phrase per capita is widely used in English in the sense of 'for each person': • the minimum cost per capita • a per capita allowance of ten pounds.
• Some people object to this usage as an inaccurate translation of the Latin phrase, which literally means 'by heads': • The estate will be divided per capita.

per cent The phrase per cent is used adverbially, in combination with a number, in the sense of 'in or for each hundred': • an increase of 25 per cent • 75 per cent of the students.
• The use of per cent as a noun, meaning 'one-hundredth' or 'a percentage', is disliked by some users; the phrase half a per cent, for example, is better replaced by half of one per cent.
See also PERCENT.

In American English per cent is usually written as one word. In British English the two-word form is preferred.
See also SINGULAR or PLURAL?

percentage Many people object to the use of a percentage to mean 'a small part', 'a little', or 'a few': • Only a percentage of the workforce will be present. A percentage may be as small as 1% or as large as 99%; in the sense of 'proportion' the noun often needs a qualifying adjective for clarity: • A small percentage of the money is used for administration costs. • A large percentage of the stock was damaged in the fire.
• When discussing a particular percentage, prefixed by the, a singular verb should be used: The percentage of patents is lower this year. When percentage is prefixed by a, the verb usually agrees with the following noun: • A small percentage of new vehicles are defective. • A large percentage of the work has already been done.
Percentage is sometimes better replaced by number, amount, part, or proportion; a high percentage by many or much; a lower percentage by fewer or less, etc.
The use of the noun percentage as a synonym for 'advantage' or 'profit' is best restricted to informal contexts: • There's no real percentage in sending your children to a private school.

perceptible, perceptive or perciplent? The adjective perceptible means 'perceivable', 'noticeable', or 'recognizable'; perceptive means 'observant', 'discerning', or 'sensitive': • a perceptible change • a perceptive remark.
• Perceptible, which is virtually synonymous with, but less frequent than, perceptive, is largely restricted to formal contexts: • a perceptible writer.
The adverbs perceptibly and perceptively are often confused, being similar in spelling and pronunciation: • The children were perceptibly quieter when their teacher was present. • She spoke perceptively of the composer's orchestral works.

peremptory or perfunctory? Peremptory means 'commanding; dogmatic; positive; decisive': • a peremptory order • a peremptory man • in a peremptory tone of voice • a peremptory knock at the door. Perfunctory means 'quick; careless; cursory; superficial': • a perfunctory glance at the letter. Both adjectives are largely restricted to formal contexts; they should not be confused.
• Peremptory is usually pronounced [per'memptər],
with the stress on the second syllable, but [per-
ren'tjʊər], stressed on the first syllable, is an ac-
ceptable alternative.

perennial see ANNUAL, BIENNIAL OR PERENNIAL.

perfect Many people avoid using such adverbs as very, rather, more, most, less, least, etc., to qualify the adjective perfect, meaning 'faultless', 'unblemished', 'complete', or 'utter': • This book is in less perfect condition than that one. • It was the most perfect diamond that he had ever seen. The expressions nearly perfect and almost perfect, how-
ever, are generally acceptable.

• The pronunciation of the adjective perfect is different from that of the verb. The adjective is stressed on the first syllable [pər'fɪkt], whereas the verb is stressed on the second syllable [pər'fekt].

perfunctory see PEREMPTORY OR PERFUNCT-
ory.

perimeter see PARAMETER.

perk see PREREQUISITE or PERQUISITE?

permissible or permissive? These two adjectives are derived from the verb permit, meaning 'allow' or 'authorize'. Permissible means 'permitted'; permissible means 'toler-
ant': • the smallest permissible investment • a permissive attitude. Permissive sometimes implies disapproval of such tolerance (or of the thing tolerated), especially when it is used with reference to sexual indulgence: • the permissive society.

• Note the spelling of permissible, particularly the-
sible ending.

perpetrate or perpetuate? Perpetrate means 'commit' or 'perform'; perpetuate means 'cause to continue' or 'make perpet-
ual': • to perpetrate a crime • to perpetuate a tradition. The two verbs should not be confused.

per pro. see P.P.

perquisite see PREREQUISITE or PERQUISITE?

perse The Latin phrase perse, meaning 'by itself' or 'in itself', is best restricted to formal contexts: • The discovery is of little importance per se.

• Note the spelling and pronunciation of the word se [say].

persecute or prosecute? Persecute means 'harass' or 'oppress'; prosecute means 'take

legal action against': • They were persecuted for their beliefs. • Trespassers will be prose-
cuted. The two verbs should not be confus-
ed.

perseverance The noun perseverence is sometimes misspelt. A common error is the addition of an extra -r- before the -e- . Note also the -ance ending.

persevere The verb persevere is followed by the preposition in or with: • They persevered in [or with] their efforts to dam the stream.

person Many people prefer to use the noun person, rather than man, to denote a human being whose sex is unspecified: • We need to take on another person to deal with the back-
log.

• The substitution of person for man in such words as chairman, salesman, statesman, layman, craftsman, etc., is a more contro-
versial issue: • Mr Smith has resigned as chairperson of the committee. • Mrs Liz Forsdick . . . will act as 'person' in the third qualifying round game (The Guardian).

Some users apply the terms chairman, salesman, etc., to both men and women: • The chairman of the CBI's Smaller Firms Council, Mrs Jean Parker (The Guardian). Others use the more or less acceptable feminine forms chair-
woman, saleswoman, etc., for women: • the appointment was announced yesterday by Child-
Line's chairwoman, Miss Esther Rantzen (The Guardian).

See also CHAIR; MAN: NON-SEXIST TERMS.

sexual. As a general rule the substitution of person for
man, in any context, is best avoided if a simpler or more idiomatic solution can be found: the use of someone else instead of another person, nobody instead of no person, crew of four instead of four-
person crew, etc.

Person has two plurals, persons and people: see also PEOP.

See also AGREEMENT and PERSON.

personage or personality? Both nouns are applied to famous people, but they are not synonymous. Personage is used in formal contexts to refer to an important or distinguished person; a personality is a fa-
mous person from the world of show business, sport, etc.: • members of the royal family and other personages • The shop will be opened by a TV personality.
personal

The principal meaning of the noun personality is 'character'; • She has a delightful personality. • Personality is more important than looks.

**personal** see **PERSONALLY: PERSONNEL**.

**personality** see **PERSONAGE or PERSONA**?

**personally** The use of the adverb personally for emphasis is disliked by some users: • I personally prefer to spend my holidays at home.

• Similar objections may be raised to the unnecessary use of the adjective personal in such expressions as: • a personal friend • her personal opinion • a personal visit, etc.

In some contexts, however, personally and personal may serve the useful purpose of distinguishing between the unofficial and the official, the private and the professional, etc.: • I personally think you should accept their offer, but as your solicitor I must advise you to make further enquiries. • He is a business acquaintance but not a personal friend.

**personal pronouns** see **PRONOUNS**.

**persona non grata** The Latin expression persona non grata is used to refer to someone who is unwelcome or unacceptable: • After his book was published, he became persona non grata with certain foreign powers.

• The phrase, which is sometimes written or printed in italics, literally means 'person not acceptable' and is pronounced [persona non grahtah]. Its plural is personae non gratae [personee non grahthee].

**personate, personify** see **IMPERSONATE, PERSONATE or PERSONIFY**?

**personification** Personification refers to the practice of attributing human characteristics to animals, inanimate objects, or abstract ideas: • The orang-utan winked at me, for all the world like a knowing old man. • Gravity is the sworn enemy of the paraglider. Such personifications are acceptable in poetic and informal contexts, but should generally be avoided in formal contexts.

• One aspect of personification is the tradition of allotting specific genders to various inanimate objects, such as cars and ships, which are frequently described as feminine (despite recent official decisions to end this practice): • She's a beautiful little craft.

**personnel** Many people object to the frequent use of the noun personnel in place of staff, workforce, workers, employees, people, etc.: • They do not have enough personnel to cope with the increased workload. The word personnel is principally used to denote the employees of a large company or organization, considered collectively, or the department that is concerned with their recruitment and welfare: • hospital personnel • the personnel officer.

• Personnel may be a singular or plural noun, but it should not be used with a specific number:

• We are moving four people [not personnel] from the sales office to the production department.

Note the spelling of personnel, particularly the -en- and the second e, and the pronunciation of the word, with the primary stress on the last syllable [personel]. Personnel is sometimes confused with the adjective personal: • There will be strong prospects of long-term personnel development for . . . the truly commercial engineer (Sunday Times).

**person of colour** Person of colour is a preferred modern alternative to such terms as coloured and nonwhite, which many people find unacceptable: • This council welcome applications from persons of colour. Many users find the term ponderous, however, and it has yet to enjoy wide acceptance.

**persons** see **PEOPLE**.

**perspective or prospective** Perspective is a noun, meaning 'view', 'aspect', or 'objectivity'; it should not be confused with the adjective prospective, meaning 'expected', 'likely', or 'future': • a different perspective • a prospective employer.

• In painting, drawing, etc., the noun perspective principally refers to the representation of three-dimensional objects and their relative sizes and positions on a flat surface. Its figurative use in the phrase in perspective is derived from this sense: • You must try to put things in perspective: the loss of one customer is relatively unimportant when the future of the company is at stake.

**perturb** see **DISTURB or PERTURB**?

**pervasive or perverted** Pervasive means 'obstinate' or 'contrary'; perverted means 'corrupt' or 'characterized by abnormal sexual behaviour': • a pervasive refusal • a perverted attack. The two adjectives should
not be confused: to call a man perverted is a more serious and offensive accusation than to call him perverse.

- Both adjectives may be applied to the same noun in different contexts: • He took a perverse delight in making her wait. • He took a perverted delight in torturing his victims.

**phase** see FAZE or PHASE?

**phenomena** see PHENOMENON or PHENOMENA?

**phenomenon** or phenomena? Phenomenon is the plural form of the noun phenomenon: • This phenomenon is of great interest. • Such phenomena are not easy to explain.

- The use of phenomena as a singular noun, a frequent error, is wrong: • 'The development of the Muslim community in Britain is only a recent phenomenon and needs proper research,' Mr Ayman Ahval, London spokesman of the World Muslim League, said (The Times).

Careful users avoid overuse of the word phenomenon, resisting the tendency in recent years to apply the word to anything mildly unusual: • The increasing number of police on the streets is a recent phenomenon.

**philosophy** The noun philosophy is best avoided where idea, view, policy, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • My philosophy is that children should be seen and not heard. • The company has a philosophy of round management practices at the local level.

**phlegm** This word causes problems with spelling and pronunciation. Note the initial ph- spelling, pronounced [flem], and the silent g. The word is pronounced [flem].

**phobia** A phobia is an abnormal or irrational fear or aversion: • He has a phobia about flying. • She has a phobia of spiders.

- The noun should not be used as a synonym for 'dislike', 'dread', 'obsession', 'inhibition', etc.: • She has a phobia of losing her car keys. • He has a phobia about undressing in front of other people.

See also SUFFIXES, page 293.

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**PHOBIAS**

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phone  The use of the noun and verb phone in place of telephone is becoming increasingly frequent and acceptable: the telephone directory is now officially entitled 'The Phone Book', the term long used to describe it in informal contexts. The shortened form phone is best avoided, however, in formal contexts: • The phone's ringing. • You'd better phone the doctor. • The cost of your telephone call will be refunded. • Please write or telephone for an application form.

See also ABBREVIATIONS; APOSTROPE.

phoney or phony?  The more frequent spelling of this word, meaning 'fake', is phoney in British English, and phony in American English.

phosphorous or phosphorus?  Phosphorous is the correct spelling for the adjective meaning 'containing phosphorus' or 'of or relating to phosphorus': • The craft will probe the phosphorous clouds. Phosphorus is the correct spelling for the noun referring to the chemical element: • The industrial uses of phosphorus.

photo  The use of the noun photo in place of photograph is best restricted to informal contexts: • Did you take a photo of the baby? • This pass is not valid without a photograph of the holder. The plural of photo is photos.

• The word photo is not generally used as a shortened form of the verb photograph.

See also ABBREVIATIONS; APOSTROPE.

photo-opportunity  Photo-opportunity (or photocall) is a vogue term used for a prearranged event for press and television photographers: • Now the gloves are off, life is one endless round of photo-opportunities, media calls, . . . and hectic journeys across the country (The Times). • Whirling from photocall to photocall, now cutting a birthday cake, now smiling coyly by a What-the-Butler-Saw machine, . . . (The Guardian). The opportunity is ostensibly for the camera operators, but in fact is created by and for the politician or media star being photographed in order to obtain favourable visual publicity.

• Both photo-opportunity and photocall may be spelt as two-word compounds, without hyphens.

phrase  A phrase is a group of words that function together as a noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, etc.: • the red car • give up • highly polished • at the back of the room • with reference to.

See also CLAUSE; SENTENCES.

physician or physict?  A physician is a doctor of medicine; a physict is a scientist who has specialized in physics: • the number of physicians in the National Health Service • physicists involved in nuclear research. The two nouns should not be confused.

• The term physician is chiefly used to distinguish qualified medical practitioners in nonsurgical fields from surgeons. In everyday usage the term doctor is preferred; physician sounds formal or old-fashioned in British English.

physiognomy  Note the spelling of this word, which means 'the outward appearance of a person considered to show the person's character'. The most frequent error is to omit the silent g.

picarese or picturesque?  A picturesque story is one that deals with the adventures of a rogue. Examples of picarese novels in English include Daniel Defoe's Moll Flanders and Henry Fielding's Jonathan Wild. picturesque is used much more frequently and means 'attractive and charming; quaint' and 'evocative; vivid': • picturesque villages • picturesque language.

• Picarese derives ultimately from Spanish picar 'a rogue; wily trickster'.

picnic  This word adds a k before the suffixes -er, -ed, -ing: • picnickers • They picnicked in the woods.

See also SPEILING 1.

picturesque see PICARESE OR PICTURESQUE?

pidgin or pigeon?  These two words may sometimes be confused. Pidgin is a language that is a mixture of two other languages: • pidgin English. A pigeon is a grey bird with short legs and compact feathers: • the pigeons of Trafalgar Square.

• Pigeon also has the informal, rather old-fashioned sense of 'concern': • that's his pigeon.

piéce de résistance  The phrase pièce de résistance, meaning 'main dish of a meal; most outstanding or impressive item', is of French origin and is sometimes written or printed in italics in English texts: • The designer's pièce de résistance was the exquisite dress worn by the princess at her wedding. Note the accents, which serve to distinguish
piece, pronounced [pyes], from the English word piece [piːs], and résistance [rezistɑ̃] from the English word resistance [resistəns]; these accents should never be omitted.

♦ The plural is formed by adding -s to the first word, pièces de résistance.

pie see PEER or PIER?

pigmy see PYGMY or PIGMY?

plt see PEAK, PEEK or PIQUE?

piteous, pitiful or pitiful? All these adjectives mean 'arousing or deserving pity,' in which sense they are virtually interchangeable in many contexts. There are, however, slight differences of usage and application between them: • a piteous cry • a pitiful figure • a pitiful sight.

♦ Note the spelling of piteous, the least frequent of the three adjectives, in which the i is followed by e rather than i (as in pitiful and pitiful).

Pitiful and pitiful have the additional meaning of 'arousing or deserving contempt'; • Their pitiful offer of a two per cent pay rise was immediately rejected by the union.

pivotal The frequent use of the adjective pivotal in the sense of 'crucial or very important' is disliked by some users: • to come to a pivotal decision.

♦ Note the pronunciation of pivotal, which is stressed on the first syllable [pɪˈvələl].

place or place? These two words are occasionally confused since they are pronounced in the same way [plays]. Place means 'location' or 'position'; • Everything is back in its place. • What a delightful place. It should not be confused with plaise, which refers to a large flat-bodied sea fish: • They had a fine catch of plaise.

plain or plane? These words are sometimes confused. The main noun sense of plain is 'level, treeless expanse of land': • the vast plains of the prairies. Plane as a noun is a shortened form of aeroplane, a carpenter's tool, or a surface in geometry.

See also PLANE.

♦ Plain has several adjectival senses, including 'straightforward,' 'simple,' and 'clear'; the adjectival use of plane means 'flat'; • a plane surface.

The idiomatic expression plain sailing is used to describe easy progress: • Once I've mended this switch, the rest will be plain sailing.

plaintiff or plaintive? These words are sometimes confused. A plaintiff is the person who commences legal action in a court; plaintive means 'mournful and melancholy': • a plaintive song.

plane The use of the noun plane as a shortened form of aeroplane is acceptable in most contexts: • What time does your plane leave? • More than 250 people were killed in the plane crash.

See also ABBREVIATIONS; APOSTROPHE; PLAIN or PLANE?

plastic The first syllable of the word plastic may be pronounced with the short a of plan, or with the long a of plant. The first of these pronunciations, [plæstɪk], is more frequent than the second, [plæstɪk].

♦ Many people object to the informal use of the noun plastic to mean 'payment by credit cards'; • I very rarely pay by cash these days – I usually use plastic.

platform The use of the noun platform to denote the declared policies and principles of a political party or candidate is disliked by some users as an Americanism but is acceptable to most: • Their unilateralist platform will win them few votes in the forthcoming election.

playwright see DRAMATIST or PLAYWRIGHT?

plc This abbreviation for public limited company is often written or printed in lower-case letters, without full stops.

♦ A public limited company is a company whose shares can be bought and sold on the stock exchange, as opposed to a private limited company, which has the abbreviation Ltd (spelt with a capital L and usually without a full stop) after its name.

pleaded or pled? In British English pleaded is the usual form of the past tense and past participle of the verb plead: • 'Save my child,' she pleaded. • They had pleaded with him to stay.

♦ Pled is an American, Scottish, or dialectal variant of pleaded.

Plead has particular significance as a legal term in the context of a defendant admitting or denying guilt: • She pleaded guilty when the case came to court.

pleasantness or pleasantry? Pleasantness is an uncountable noun, meaning 'the state of being pleasant': • the pleasantness of the
weather. Pleasantries is chiefly used in more formal English in the plural form pleasantries, meaning ‘polite, casual, friendly, agreeable, or amusing remarks’; • to exchange pleasantries.

plenitude Plenitude means ‘abundance’: • religious adornments in great plenitude. A formal word, it is best avoided where plenty would be adequate or more appropriate.
• The word plenitude is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent error being the insertion of a t after the n, as in plenty. It is pronounced (plenitud).

plenty The use of plenty as an adverb, in place of quite or very, is regarded by some as nonstandard: • The house is plenty big enough for us. • She was plenty upset when she heard the news.
• The second of these uses is generally considered to be an Americanism.

The adjectival use of plenty without of is also unacceptable to many users: • They have plenty toys to play with.

plethora The phrase a plethora of implies excess or superfluity; it should not be used as a pretentious synonym for ‘a large number of or plenty of’: • a plethora of houses for sale, for example, describes a situation in which there are too many houses on the market, far more than the number of prospective buyers, with the result that many will remain unsold.

plum or plumb? These two words are occasionally confused since they are pronounced in the same way. Plum variously refers to the fruit of the plum tree or to something of choice quality: • She served up a dish of plums and custard. • He’s landed a plum job with the government. It should not be confused with plumb, which means ‘install piping for water’ or ‘probe’: • He has plumbed in the new sink. • She plumbed the depths of despair. Note also the spelling of plumb line, denoting a line with a weight attached that is used to check or determine verticality.
• Both words are pronounced [plum].

plurals The regular way of forming plurals for English words is to add an -s, except for words ending in -s, -x, -ch, -sh, and -z, where -es is added: • ships • houses • hoes • foxes • churches • sakes • buzzes. Of course, there are many irregularly formed plurals.

Words ending in a consonant and then -y have -ies in the plural: • fairies • ponies, except for proper nouns, which have -s or -ies; • I’ve invited the Jones and the Harrys. • the Two Sicilies. Some words ending in -f or -fe have -ves in the plural: • halves • wines, while others simply add -s, and others allow a choice: • beliefs • hoofs – hooves. Some words ending in -o add -os, others just an -s.

It is impossible to formulate a general rule here, although note the frequently used potatoes and tomatoes, which both end -es. Note also that shortened forms ending in -o just add -s: • photos • pianos • radios • stereos • videos. Some nouns ending in -s are already plural and cannot be pluralized: • trousers • spectacles • scissors. With various animal names the plural form is the same as the singular: • deer • sheep • bison. The same applies to a number of other words that can be treated as either singular or plural: • crossroads: • the accused.

• Several English words have plurals not formed in any of the ways described above: • man • men • child • children • mouse • mice • goose • geese • foot • feet. There is no rule about these words and one cannot generalize from them; the plural of mongoose is mangooses (not mongooses).

Foreign words sometimes take a regular English plural and sometimes the plural of the appropriate language. Often either is regarded as correct: • château • châteaux. Latin or Greek words often take the plural of their original language. • The ending of such nouns as analysis and thesis changes to -ses in the plural: • analyses • theses. The endings -ix and -erx may change to -xes (see APPENDIXES or APPENDICIES?; INDEXES or INDICES?); the ending -a may add an -e (see FORMULAE or FORMULAS?); the endings -on and -um may change to -es (see MEDIA: PHENOMENON or PHENOMENA?); and the ending -us may change to -is (see FUNG). Difficulties often arise with the plurals of compound nouns. The general rule is that when the qualifying word is an adjective then the noun is made plural: • courts martial • poets laureate, though in less formal usage, the second word is made plural: • poet laureates. If both words are nouns the second is made plural: • town clerks, although woman teacher becomes women teachers. In compounds of a noun and a prepositional phrase or adverb, the noun is made plural: • mothers-in-law • hang- ers-on • men of war. If no words in the
compound are nouns, then -s is added at the end: • forget-me-nots • go-between • grown-ups.

On using singular or plural verbs, see SINGULAR or PLURAL?

plus The prepositional use of plus in the sense of 'with the addition of' is acceptable in all contexts: • My savings, plus the money my grandmother left me, are almost enough to buy a car.

◆ Note that the verb agrees with savings; if the sentence is reordered to make money the principal subject a singular verb must be used: • The money my grandmother left me, plus my savings, is almost enough to buy a car.

Some people avoid using the noun plus as a synonym for 'advantage' in formal contexts: • Being within walking distance of the station is one of the pluses of living on this estate.

The expression an added plus is tautological and should be avoided.

The construction plus which is avoided by many speakers, particularly when beginning a new sentence or clause: • I'm fed up and I've had enough, plus which, I'm tired.

The use of plus in the sense of 'and' or 'with' is best restricted to informal contexts: • He's afraid to go sailing because he can't swim, plus he suffers from seasickness. • She was met at the airport by her son plus his new girlfriend.

See also MINUS.

p.m. see A.M. and P.M.

pneumatic and pneumonia Note the spelling of these words, particularly the silent initial p- and the -eu- of the first syllable.

◆ The prefix pneum- is derived from a Greek word meaning 'air', as in pneumatics, 'using compressed air', or 'breath', as in pneumonia, 'inflammation of the lungs'.

poet or poetess? see -ESS; NON-SEXIST TERMS.

poignant This word, meaning 'distressing', is usually pronounced [poɪnənt] although [poʊnənt] is also acceptable. The g is silent.

policeman or policewoman? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

political or political? Politic means 'prudent', 'shrewd', or 'cunning'; political means 'of politics, government, policy-making, etc.': • a political decision • a political party. The two adjectives should not be confused.

◆ Politic was originally synonymous with political. This sense of the word survives only in the expression the body politic, meaning 'the state'.

Note the different stress patterns of the two words: politic is stressed on the first syllable, political on the second.

political correctness Political correctness, or PC, is the avoidance of words, phrases, or actions that may be deemed offensive by a particular section of society, such as ethnic minorities, homosexuals, women, and BLIND, DEAF, DISABLED or old people: • Traditional industrial terms such as 'blackleg', the 'black economy' and 'blacklisted' have been banned because they might offend TUC delegates from ethnic minorities. Speakers have been asked not to use descriptions deemed politically incorrect on grounds of race, disability and gender (Daily Telegraph). It extends beyond vocabulary, to the way people are portrayed in television advertisements, children's books, etc., and the way they interact in their working or social lives. The term is most frequently used in situations where this anxiety to avoid offence seems excessive, and is often the subject of humorous exaggeration: • The legions of the politically correct continue to direct their accusations of racism, sexism, stoasism and inappropriate body language at every area of our public and private life, sniffing out imaginary insults and creating antagonism in their wake (Daily Telegraph).

◆ Political correctness also strives to project a more positive image of negative or undesirable qualities, with the substitution of such euphemisms as deficiency achievement for failure. Other examples of terms proposed as politically correct alternatives include person of size for fat, aurally inconvenience for deaf, birth name for maiden name, and companion animal for pet.

Of American origin, political correctness is often regarded in Britain as unacceptable interference with English usage and the natural development of the English language. Nevertheless, it has served a useful purpose in drawing people's attention to the need for sensitivity in their use of words and images, and not all its suggested changes are necessarily for the worse.

See also ABLED, ABLEISM; AGEISM; CHALLENGED; NON-SEXIST TERMS; SEXISM.

politics see -ICS.
poltergeist The word poltergeist, denoting a mischievous spirit, is sometimes misspelt. Note the er in the middle and the ei in the final syllable. The word is pronounced [poltərgeist].

pomegranate Note the spelling of this word, particularly the single m and the -ate ending (not -ite, as in granite). Note also the first e, which is usually sounded in British English [poməgrænət], but is often dropped in the American English pronunciation [poməgrænt].

populace or populous? These two words are occasionally confused since they are pronounced in the same way [pɒˈpʊləs]. Populace is a noun meaning ‘inhabitants’ or ‘the ordinary people’: • The cries roused the populace. • This news will not go down well with the general populace. Populous is an adjective meaning ‘densely populated’ or ‘crowded’: • California is the nation’s most populous state.

pore or pour? These spellings are sometimes confused. Pore as a verb means ‘look intently’: • They pored over the map; pour means ‘cause to flow’: • She poured the tea. The noun pore refers to a minute opening in the skin.

portmanteau word see blends.

Portuguese This word is sometimes misspelt; note the second u and the -e- that follows it.

position To position is to put carefully and deliberately in a specific place; the verb is best avoided where place, put, post, situate, locate, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate. • She positioned the mat on the carpet to hide the stain. • He put [not positioned] his dirty plate on top of the others. • The offices are situated [not positioned] in the town centre.

post- Some people object to the frequent use of the prefix post-, meaning ‘after’, to coin new adjectives, often of a futuristic nature: • post-nuclear Britain • post-feminist literature • Russia has shivered in the cold wind of economic reality throughout the post-Communist period, or to produce cumbersome phrases that could be reworded more elegantly: • post-September 11 anxiety • post-retirement financial planning.

posthumous This word causes problems with spelling and pronunciation. In speech the h is silent [pəʊst-juˈməʊs]; the first syllable is not as in post, but as in possible.

postman or postwoman? see non-sexist terms.

post-traumatic stress disorder The phrase post-traumatic stress disorder (or syndrome) denotes a combination of largely psychological symptoms, such as irrational fear, feelings of guilt, depression, night-
marcs, etc., resulting from the shock of being involved in a highly distressing situation, such as a rail or plane crash, a major fire, a terrorist bomb attack, or warfare: • The . . . constable has been diagnosed as having post-traumatic stress syndrome resulting from her experiences while on the Stevens investigation into links between the security forces and loyalist groups (Daily Telegraph).
• Originally applied to American veterans of the Vietnam War, the term is sometimes regarded as a modern or pretentious synonym for shell shock or battle fatigue.

pour see POKE or POOR?

power The word power is sometimes used adjectivally to refer to an important business occasion. For example: • a power breakfast or lunch is a meeting of influential people from e.g. politics, business, or the media that is held over breakfast (or lunch). This vogue usage is best restricted to informal contexts.

p.p. The abbreviation p.p. (or per pro.), short for the Latin phrase per procurationem, is used when signing a letter on behalf of somebody else. The Latin phrase means 'by proxy' or 'through the agency of', and the abbreviation should precede the name of the person signing the letter.
• In modern usage the abbreviation is frequently interpreted as 'for and on behalf of' and placed before the name of the person on whose behalf the letter is signed. This 'incorrect' sequence is so well-established that the correct usage could lead to misunderstanding.

practical or practicable? The adjective practical has a wide range of senses; the principal meaning of practicable is 'capable of being done or put into practice'. A practicable suggestion is simply possible or feasible; a practical suggestion is also useful, sensible, realistic, economical, profitable, and likely to be effective or successful: • It may be practicable to create jobs for everyone but this would not be a practical solution to the problems of unemployment.
• Careful users maintain the distinction between the two words, which is also applicable to their antonyms, impractical and impracticable: • It's impractical to use the washing machine when you only have a couple of shirts to wash. • It's impracticable to use the washing machine when there is a power cut. Unpractical, a less frequent antonym of practical, may refer to a person who lacks practical abilities.

Additional senses of practical include 'not theoretical', 'suitable for use', 'skilled at doing or making things', and 'virtual': • a practical course in carpentry • a more practical layout for the kitchen • My brother is not a very practical man. • She has practical control of the company.

See also PRACTICAL.

practically The adverb practically is widely used as a synonym for 'almost', 'nearly', 'virtually', etc.: • I practically broke my ankle.
• Some people dislike this usage, which can lead to confusion with one of the more literal senses of the word: • It is practically impossible, for example, may mean 'it is impossible in practice' or 'it is almost impossible'.

See also PRACICAL or PRACTICABLE?

practice or practise? The noun is practice, the verb is practise: • the doctor's practice • the doctor who practises in our town.
• In American English both the noun and verb are spelt practice.

practitioner This word is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent error being the substitution of c or s for the final t.

pray or prey? These spellings are sometimes confused. The verb pray means 'speak to God': • pray for forgiveness. The verb prey, which is usually followed by on or upon, means 'hunt' or 'obscure': • The lion preys on other animals. • The problem is preying on my mind. The noun prey means 'animals hunted for food': • birds of prey.
• Spelling mistakes may be avoided if prayer is associated with prayer.

pre- see HYPHEN 1; PER, PRE- or PRO-; PREWAR.

precautionary measure The phrase precautionary measure can usually be replaced by the noun precaution, which denotes a measure taken to avoid something harmful or undesirable: • The police closed the road as a precautionary measure against flooding.

precede or proceed? Precede means 'come before', 'go before', or 'be before'; proceed means 'continue', 'go on', or 'advance': • September precedes October. • The text is preceded by an introduction. • I am unable to proceed with this work. • They proceeded to dismantle the car.
The two verbs should not be confused or misspelt; note the different spelling but identical pronunciation of the second syllables, -cede and -ceed [-seed].

**precedence** or **precedent**? The noun *precedence* means ‘priority’ or ‘superiority’; the noun *precedent* denotes a previous example that may serve as a model (in a court of law or elsewhere); • Should this work take precedence over our other commitments? • The guests were seated in order of precedence. • The committee’s decision has set a precedent for future claims. • This result is without precedent.

Both nouns are derived from the verb *precede* (see *precede* or *proceed*?); to interchange them is wrong.

The pronunciation of *precedence* is [priˈsedəns]. The noun *precedent* is pronounced [priˈsedenton], but the rarer adjective is pronounced [priˈsedent].

**precipitate** or **precipitous**? The adjective *precipitate* means ‘rushing’, ‘hasty’, ‘rash’, or ‘sudden’; *precipitous* means ‘like a precipice’ or ‘very steep’; • a precipitate decision • their precipitate departure • a precipitous slope.

The substitution of *precipitous* for *precipitate* is disliked by some users but acknowledged by most dictionaries. *Precipitate*, however, should not be used in the sense of ‘precipitous’.

The word *precipitate* is also used as a verb and as a noun, in the pronunciation of the adjective and noun the final syllable is unstressed [prɪˈspɪtət].

The verb has the same primary stress pattern but the final syllable is pronounced to rhyme with gate [prɪˈspɪtæt].

**preclude** see EXCLUDE or **preclude**?

**precondition** see CONDITION or **precondition**?

**predecessor** The noun *predecessor* denotes the previous holder of an office, post, etc.; • Her predecessor had left the accounts in a mess. Although the words *predecessor* and *decease* (meaning ‘death’) are both derived from the Latin verb *decedere*, a predecessor is not necessarily dead; the Latin verb means ‘go away’, not ‘die’.

• Note the spelling of predecessor, particularly the -e- and -es- and the -or ending.

**predicate** The *predicate* is that part of a sentence or clause that includes information about the **subject**, but excludes the subject itself. Thus, in *the President conceded defeat* the predicate is *conceded defeat*. See also **predicate** of **predicate**?

**predicative** see ADJECTIVES.

**predict** or **predicate**? To *predict* is to foretell; the verb *predicate* means ‘affirm’, ‘declare’, or ‘imply’; • It is impossible to predict the result of tomorrow’s match. • They predicted that the accident had been caused by negligence.

• In British English the verb *predicate* is rare and largely restricted to formal contexts. In American English, however, it is widely used as a synonym for ‘base’ or ‘found’; • Her decision was predicated on past experience.

In grammar and logic the word *predicate* is also used as a noun (see *predicate*).

The verb *predicate* is pronounced [predikət]; the noun is pronounced [predikət].

**preface** see FOREWORD or **preface**?; **prefix** or **preface**?

**prefer** The elements that follow the verb *prefer* should be separated by to, not than; • I prefer cricket to football. • She prefers watching television to reading a book.

• If these elements are infinitives, the preposition to (and the second infinitive marker) may be replaced by rather than in informal contexts; • He prefers to walk rather than (to) drive. In formal contexts the sentence should be rephrased; • He would rather walk than drive. • He prefers walking to driving.

Careful users avoid qualifying the verb *prefer* and its derived adjective *preferable* with such adverbs as very, most, etc.; • Which dress do you prefer [not prefer most]? • Quiet background music is acceptable but complete silence is preferable [not more preferable].

The verb *prefer* is stressed on the second syllable; the final r is doubled before -ed, -ing, and -er. In the adjective *preferable*, the adverb *preferably*, and the noun *preference*, the stress shifts to the first syllable and the second r is not doubled. The pronunciation of *preferable* with the stress on the second syllable [priˈferəbl] is widely disliked.

See also **spelling** 1.

**prefix** or **preface**? The words *prefix* and *preface* are most frequently used as nouns (see **foreword** or **preface**?; **prefixes** and **suffixes**). As verbs, both can mean ‘add at the beginning’ or ‘put before’, although *preface*
prefixes

is more common: • She prefaced/fixed her speech with a few words of welcome.
• Some users dislike this use of the verb prefix, reserving it for the literal sense: 'add as a prefix': • The word 'organized' may be prefixed by 'dis-' or 'un-'.

Prefixes and suffixes Prefixes and suffixes are elements attached to a word in order to form a new word. Prefixes are attached to the beginnings of words and include: • un- • dis- • anti- • non- • ex-. Prefixes are attached to the ends of words and include: • -ism • -ful • -dom • -logy • -ship.
• Prefixes are sometimes used with hyphens, sometimes not: • disenchanted • ex-husband: see HYPHEN 1.

There are some cases where a word cannot stand alone without its prefix: • uncouth • disgruntled • dishevelled • unkept, although gruntled, kempt, etc., are occasionally used jocularly.

Most affixes are in productive use: they can be attached to any appropriate noun. However, new coinages involving affixes are often disliked: see, for example, MACRO- and MICRO-.

PREFIXES

Cross-references, e.g. see AERO or AIR?, are also included to main entries in the Good Word Guide where there is a fuller discussion.

a- 1 without: not: • asymmetrical 2 m; on: at: • ashore
aero-, air- • aeronautics see AERO or AIR?
ambi- both: two: • ambivalent
ante- before: • antenatal see ANTE- or ANTI-?
anthropo- human: • anthropology
anti- against: • anti-aircraft see ANTE- or ANTI-?
arch-, archi- chief: • archenemy see ARCH AND ARCHI-
astro- stars: • astronomy
audio- hearing or sound: • audiovisual
auto- self: • autobiography
be- (used to make verbs): • becalm
bi- two: twice: • bicycle see BI-
biblio- books: • bibliography
bio- life: • biography • biology see BIO-
by- less important: • by-election
centi one hundredth: • centimetre
chron- time: • chronological
co-, col-, com-, con-, cor- together: with: • collect • combine: see CO-
contra- against: opposite: • contradict
counter- 1 opposite: • counteract 2 corresponding: matching: • counterpart
cyber- computers: • cybercafés see CYBER-
de- 1 take away something: • dethrone
2 go back: • decode see DE-
deca- ten times: • decagon see DECA or DECI?
deci- one tenth: • decibel see DECA or DECI?
demi- half: • demigod see DEMI, HEMI- or SEMI-?
di- two: • diphthong • dioxide
diag- through: across: • diameter
dig- digital: • digibox
dis- 1 not: • disagree • dissimilar 2 opposite: • disconnect see DIS- or Dys?
dys- abnormal: • dysfunction see DIS- or Dys?
e- 1 electronic: • e-mail 2 European: • e-number see E-
eco- environment: ecology: • eco-friendly
• eco-aware see ECO-
electro- electricity: • electrolysis
em-, en- 1 (used to make verbs): • enthroned
2 enrich • enable 2 m; intro: • enlist
equi- equal: • equidistant
Euro- European Union: • Eurocrat: see EURO-
ex- 1 former: • ex-president 2 out of: • expel see EX
extra- outside: • extraterrestrial
for- prohibition: • forbid see FOR- or FORE?
fore- 1 front: • foreword 2 before: • foretell see FOR- or FORE?
geo- earth: • geology
grand- parents of one's parents; children of one's children: • grandfather • granddaughter see GRAND or GREAT?
haemo- blood: • haemorrhage
hect-, hecto- one hundred: • hectare
hem- half: • hemisphere see SEMI-, HEMI- or SEMI-?
hepta- seven: • heptagon
hexa- six; hexagon
homo- same; homogeneous
hydro- water; hydroelectricity
hyper- much more than normal; hypermarket see HYPER- or HYPO-?
   under: hyperthyroid see HYPER- or HYPO-?
   ig-, il-, im-, in-, ir- not: ignorable; illogical; impossible
infra- below; infra-red
inter- 1 between; 2 intermediary 2 from
   one to another; interchange see INTER- or INTRA-?
infra- inside; intravenous see INTER- or INTRA-?
kilo- one thousand; kilometre
macro- large; macrocosm see MACRO-
   and MICRO-
mal- bad; malfunction
mega- 1 million; mega watt 2 big; mega phone see MEGA-
   1 change; after: metamorphosis
   2 transcending; metafiction see META-
micro- small; microscope see MACRO-
   and MICRO-
mid- middle; midday
milli- one thousandth; millimetre
mini- small; minibus
mis- bad; badly; mislead
mono- one; monotonous
multi- many; multicoloured see MULTI-
   neo- new; neoclassical
neuro- mind or nerves; neurosis
non- not: nonstop see NON-
ob- against; obstruct
octa-, octo- eight; octagon; octopus
omni- all; omnipotent
ortho- correct; orthodox
out- 1 greater than; 2 outside; outbuilding
over- 1 above; 2 too much; overdo see OVERLY
   five; pentagon
peri- around; perimeter
photo- 1 light; photosynthesis
   2 photography; photocopier
physio- nature; physiology
poly- many; polygon
post- after: postscript; post-war see POST-
pref- before: prelude
pro- 1 in favour of; pro-African
   2 substitute; pronoun
proto- first; original; prototype
pseudo- not real; pretended; pseudonym
psycho- mind; behaviour; psychology
quad- four; quadrangle
quin- five; quintet
re- again; reappear; see RE-
retro- back; retrograde see RETRO-
self- oneself; self-confident see SELF-
semi- half; semicircle see SEMI-
   or SEMI-?
sept- seven; septet
sex- six; sextet
socio- social; society; sociology
sub- 1 under; subsoil; 2 less than; subnormal
super- 1 over; superimpose; 2 greater; super sonic see SUPER-
   together with; sympathy; synthesis
   practical skill and science;
   technology see TECHNO-
   tele- distant; telephone; television see TELE-
tri- three; triangle
turbo- 1 driven by a turbine; turbojet
   2 powerful; turbo computer see TURBO-
ultra- beyond; ultraviolet see ULTRA
   un- 1 not; unhappy; 2 opposite;
   undo; unlike; see NON-
under- 1 below; undergrowth; too little;
   underdeveloped
uni- one; unity
vice- assistant; vice-president
video- video; videolink

prelude The frequent use of the noun prelude in the sense of 'introduction' is disliked by some users: The leaders had an informal meeting this morning as a prelude to next week's summit in Geneva.

premier The adjective premier is best avoided where foremost, principal, first, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: We consulted one of the country's premier authorities on the subject.

PREMIERE, which is sometimes pronounced in the same way.
premiere

Some people dislike the use of the word *premiere* as a verb, meaning 'give the first performance of': • The film will be *premiered* in New York.

- The verb is also used intransitively: • The play *premiered* in the West End.

The noun *premiere*, meaning 'first performance', is acceptable to all users; • the world premiere of Andrew Lloyd Webber's latest musical.

*Premiere* may be pronounced [pre'miər] or [pre'm-ir], it is sometimes spelt with a grave accent on the second e, as in the French word from which it is derived: *premier*.

See also **ACCENTS**.

**premises**
The noun *premises*, denoting a building (or buildings) and any accompanying land or grounds, is always plural: • Their new premises are on the other side of the railway line.

- The singular noun *premise*, which is not used in this context, means 'assumption' or 'proposition'; it has the variant spelling *premiss*.

**premiss** see **PREMISES**.

**preoccupeed** see **OCCUPIED** or **PREOCCUPIED**.

**preparation**
The noun *preparation* is sometimes misspelt, a frequent error being the substitution of *per-* for *par-* as in desperation.

**prepositions** Prepositions are such words as: • at • with • of • up • before that show the relation of a noun or noun equivalent to the rest of the sentence.

- One often hears of the grammatical rule that sentences should never end with a preposition, it is true that prepositions, as their name implies, usually precede the noun or pronoun to which they are attached; • It was under the chair. • They drove to Birmingham, but it certainly does not have to be in this position. • Which village did you stay in? and in which village did you stay? are both possible, although the latter sounds more formal. In some cases it is hardly possible to put the preposition anywhere but at the end of the sentence: • What is he up to? • It isn't worth worrying about. A reliable rule is that the preposition should be placed where it sounds most natural.

The 'rule' about not ending a sentence with a preposition originated in the fact that a Latin sentence cannot end with a preposition, but there is no reason for this to have any implication for English usage.

A preposition does not need to be repeated when it applies to two elements of a sentence: • They went to France and Italy. • He behaved with tact and discretion, although the preposition must be repeated if ambiguity might otherwise arise, • They were arguing about physical fitness and about drinking spirits could have a different meaning if the second about were omitted.

On the use of a preposition with a particular verb, adjective, or noun see individual entries.

**prerequisite or perquisite** A prerequisite is a precondition; a perquisite is a benefit, privilege, or exclusive right: • A degree is not a prerequisite for a career in journalism. • A company car is often regarded as a perquisite.

- In the sense of 'incidental benefit' the noun *perquisite* is largely restricted to formal contexts, the abbreviation *perk* being the usual form elsewhere: • one of the perks of the job.

See also **PREREQUISITE** or **REQUISITE**.

**prerequisite or requisite** Both these words may be used as nouns or adjectives. **Requisite** relates to anything that is required, necessary, essential, or indispensable; prerequisite relates to something that is required in advance: • Does the building have the requisite number of fire exits? • The shop sells pens, paper, and other writing requisites. • Physical fitness is prerequisite to a prerequisite of success at sport.

See also **PREREQUISITE** or **REQUISITE**.

**prescribe or prescribe** To prescribe is to lay down as a rule or to advise or order as a remedy; to prescribe is to condemn, prohibit, outlaw, or exile: • The union has prescribed a new procedure for dealing with complaints. • Surrogate motherhood has been prescribed in Britain. • Prescribing the doctor's habit of prescribing (Daily Telegraph headline).

- The two verbs are similar in pronunciation but almost opposite in meaning: a prescribed book is recommended, a prescribed book should not be read; a prescribed drug should be taken, a proscripted drug is banned.

**presently** Some people object to the increasingly frequent use of the adverb presently in place of currently, at present, or now: • Mr Iain Duncan-Smith, presently leader of the opposition • The company presently manufactures components for the electronics industry.

- The word has long been used in this sense in Scotland and America.
The principal meaning of presently in British English is 'soon': • We walked a little further and presently we reached the inn. • I'll phone him presently.

**preside** The verb preside is followed by the preposition at or over: • The chairman presided at [or over] the meeting.

**pressure** or **pressurize**? The verb pressure, which literally means 'apply pressure to', is frequently used in the figurative sense of 'coerce': • They were pressured into accepting the pay rise.

- The literal meaning of the verb pressurize is 'increase the pressure in', but it is also used figuratively in British English: • Aircraft cabins are pressurized to maintain normal atmospheric pressure at high altitudes. • They were pressurized into accepting the pay rise.

- The figurative use of pressurize and pressurized is disused and avoided by some users, especially in potentially ambiguous contexts: • The ability to work effectively in a pressurized stimulating environment is essential (Daily Telegraph).

**prestige** The noun prestige, denoting the high status, esteem, or renown derived from wealth, success, or influence, is usually pronounced [prestɪdʒ].

- Prestige is also used adjectivally: a prestige company • a prestige car.

See also **prestigious**.

**prestigious** The adjective prestigious is frequently used in the sense of 'having or conferring prestige': • new ways of raising money for the country's most prestigious opera house • The company will shortly be relocating to prestigious new offices in the City.

- The original meaning of prestigious was less complimentary: derived from the Latin word for 'conjuring tricks', it was used as a synonym for 'fraudulent' or 'deceitful'.

- Unlike prestige, prestigious has the Anglicized pronunciation [prestɪdʒ].

**presume** see **assum** or **presume**

**presumptuous** or **presumptive**? Presumptuous means 'bold', 'forward', or 'impatient'; presumptive means 'based on presumption or probability' or 'giving reasonable grounds for belief': • It's rather presumptuous of him to make such a request. • This is only presumptive evidence.

- The adjective presumptive is also used in the term her presumptive, which denotes a person whose right to succeed or inherit may be superseded by the birth of another.

Note the spelling of presumptuous, particularly the second u.

**pretence, pretension or pretentiousness?** The noun pretence denotes the act of pretending; a pretension is a claim; pretentiousness means 'ostentation' or 'affectation': • She made a pretence of closing the door. • He has no pretensions to fame. • Their pretentiousness does not impress me.

- In some contexts pretence may be used in place of pretension, especially to denote a false or unsupported claim; both nouns may be used in the sense of 'pretentiousness'.

Compare the spellings of pretension and pretentiousness, particularly the s of the former and the second t of the latter. In American English the c of pretence is replaced by s.

**prevaricate or procrastinate?** To prevaricate is to be evasive, misleading, or untruthful; to procrastinate is to delay, defer, or put off: • She prevaricated in order to avoid revealing her husband's whereabouts. • He procrastinated in the hope of avoiding the work altogether.

- The two verbs should not be confused: prevaricate is partially derived from the Latin word varus, meaning 'crooked'; procrastinate contains the Latin word cras, meaning 'tomorrow'.

**prevent** When the verb prevent is followed by an -ing form in formal contexts, the -ing form should be preceded either by from or by a possessive adjective or noun: • They prevented me from winning. • They prevented Andrew from winning. • They prevented Andrew's winning.

- In informal contexts the last example may be considered unnatural or unidiomatic and the word from may be omitted from the first two examples: • They prevented me/Andrew winning.

See also **-ING FORMS**.

**preventive** or **preventative**? Either word may be used as an adjective or noun, but preventive is the more frequent: • preventive measures • preventative surgery • This drug is used as a preventive/preventative.

- Some users consider preventative to be a needlessly long variant.

In medical and technical contexts the adjective is used with reference to procedures that forestall disease, damage, breakdown, etc., rather than
curing or repairing it: • preventive medicine • preventive maintenance.

**pre-war** This word is usually hyphenated, although some dictionaries list it as a one-word compound.

See also HYphen 1.

◆ Pre-war is generally used as an adjective; • pre-war conditions • reverting to pre-war practices. Its adverbial use is less frequent, the phrase before the war being preferred by some users: • These houses were built pre-war before the war.

In general usage pre-war usually refers to the period preceding World War II, but in some contexts the reference may be to World War I or, more rarely, to a different war. This can occasionally lead to ambiguity or confusion: • pre-war house prices in the Falkland Islands.

**prey** see PRAY or PREY?

**price** see COST or PRICE?

**prima facie** This Latin phrase is used adverbially or adjectively in the sense of 'at first sight', 'based on first impressions', or 'apparently true'. • Her argument seems reasonable prima facie. • There is prima facie evidence to support his case.

◆ Largely restricted to formal contexts, the phrase is pronounced [prɪˈmə fəˈsiː].

**primarily** Many users prefer to stress this word on the first syllable [prɪˈmərɪli], but this is very difficult to say unless one is speaking slowly and carefully. The pronunciation with the stress on the second syllable [prɪˈmə rɪli] is becoming increasingly common in British English, although it is disliked by many. It is the standard pronunciation in American English.

See also STRESS.

**prime** Some people dislike the frequent use of the adjective prime in the sense of 'best', 'most important', 'principal', etc., especially when it is applied to something that is not of the highest quality, significance, or rank: • in prime condition • the prime position • a prime example.

**primeval** This word, meaning 'of the first ages', is usually spelt primeval but in British English may also be spelt præmæval.

See also -æ and -œ.

**primitive** see SAVAGE

**principal** or **principle**? These two spellings are often confused. The adjective principal means 'of the most importance': • the principal cause; the noun principal refers to the head of an organization: • the principal of a college. Principle is always a noun and refers to a fundamental truth or standard: • moral principles. The adjectival form is principled.

◆ In principle means 'in theory', on principle means 'because of the principle'.

**principal parts** The principal parts of a verb are the main inflected forms from which all the other verb forms can be derived. In English they usually include the infinitive, the present participle, the past tense, and past participle. The principal parts of give, for example, would be: • give, giving, gave, given. Often the past tense and past participle are the same, and do not both have to be listed: • walk, walking, walked. The present participle is not always included when it is derived regularly, as in: • know, knew, known.

◆ For irregular principal parts see table at VERBS.

**principle** see **PRINCIPAL** or **PRINCIPLE**?

**prioritize** The verb prioritize, meaning 'put in order of priority' or 'give priority to', is disliked by some users as an example of the increasing tendency to coin new verbs by adding the suffix -ize to nouns and adjectives: • The methods of increasing industrial output have been prioritized. • Where women are, in fact, seen to prioritize their career, they are considered in some way 'unnatural', 'unfeminine' or 'on the shelf' (The Spectator).

**prior to** Many people object to the unnecessary use of the phrase prior to in place of the simpler and more natural preposition before: • Players and singers rehearsed the work during the afternoon prior to performing it in the evening (Chichester Observer).

◆ The use of prior as an adjective is acceptable to all: • I would like to come but unfortunately have a prior engagement.

**prise or prize?** For the meaning 'to force open', either spelling can be used in British English, but prise is more common: • In the end we managed to prise the lid off.

◆ Prize is the only possible spelling for the noun meaning 'a reward' and the verb value greatly': • Gloria won first prize in the competition. • The thieves made off with most of their prized posses-
sions. In American English, the spelling prize is more common than prise for the sense 'force open'.

pristine The use of pristine to mean 'spotlessly clean', 'pure', or 'as good as new' is acceptable to most users: • a pristine tablecloth. • He made the packet look untouched and in pristine condition (Daily Telegraph).

A few people object to this usage, restricting the adjective to its earlier sense of 'original' or 'primitive': • The mist of a pristine swamp. • The pristine severity of the Benedictine rule was moderated in the course of time.

The second syllable of pristine may be pronounced with mean or mine.

privacy This word has two pronunciations: [pri'veis] and [pri'veis] in British English.

• The standard American English pronunciation is [pri'veis].

privilege This word, meaning 'special right or advantage', is often misspelt. Note particularly the second -e- and the first -e-. Remember also that there is no d as inledge.

prize see PRISE or PRIZE?

PRO- see PER, PRE- or PRO?  

proactive Proactive, a technical term in psychology, has entered general usage as a vogue word, meaning 'taking the initiative; acting in anticipation rather than reacting after the event': • a proactive approach to business • a proactive role in the marketplace. This word is disliked by many people and should not be overused in this sense.

probe In the headline language of popular newspapers the noun probe is often used in place of the longer enquiry or investigation: • Crucial questions the BBC poll probe must answer (Sunday Times).

See also JOURNALISE.

• In medicine a probe is a slender instrument for examining a wound or cavity; space probes examine and investigate the expanse beyond the earth's atmosphere.

In non-technical contexts probe is more frequently used as a verb: • After further gentle probing, Mark revealed some new details of the incident.

procedure or proceeding? The noun procedure denotes a way of doing something; the noun proceeding (or, more frequently, proceedings) means 'something that is done': • to follow the established procedure • to take part in the proceedings. The two words should not be confused.

• Note the difference in spelling between the two words, particularly the -ed- of procedure and the -ed- of proceeding.

proceed see PRECEDE or PROCEED?

proceeding see PROCEDURE or PROCEEDING?

process The noun process is always pronounced with the stress on the first syllable, [prəs]. (The pronunciation [prəs], with a short -o-, is largely restricted to American English.) The verb process is also stressed on the first syllable in most contexts; however, in the rare sense 'move (as if) in a procession': • They process down the avenue, the second syllable is stressed, [prəs].

• This rare sense, a BACK FORMATION from procession, is etymologically distinct from the noun and other meanings of the verb.

pro-choice see PRO-LIFE.

procrastinate see PREVARICATE or PROCRAS-

tinate?

prodigal Prodigal means 'recklessly wasteful', 'extravagant', or 'lavish': • Her brother has always been prodigal with his money. • They were prodigal of praise.

• The use of the adjective prodigal to mean 'returning home after a long absence' based on a misunderstanding of the word in the New Testament parable of the prodigal son, Luke 15:11–32 is disliked and avoided by some careful users: • Prodigal performers from the Batham Players are to return home 40 years on (Chichester Observer).

The use of the noun prodigal, however, in the extended sense of 'returned wanderer' or 'repentant sinner', rather than the traditional sense of 'spendthrift', is acceptable to most: • The prodigal has returned.

prodigly or protégé? The noun prodigy, meaning 'marvel', is used to denote an exceptionally talented person, especially a child: • Tracy Austin, then 14, was starting to be acknowledged as one of the first child prodigies in professional tennis (Daily Telegraph). A protégé is someone who receives help, guidance, protection, patronage, etc., from a more influential or experienced person: • one of Lord Olivier's protégés. The two nouns should not be confused.
produce

Derived from the French word protégé, meaning 'protect', the noun protégé has the (optional) feminine form protégée.

produce or product? Both these nouns denote something that is produced. Produce refers to things that have been produced by growing or farming, whereas product usually refers to industrially produced goods: 

- farm produce 
- the company's latest product.

The noun product is also used in more abstract senses: 

- He is a product of the public-school system. 
- the product of a vivid imagination. 

Such attitudes are the product of ignorance and suspicion.

Both nouns are pronounced with the stress on the first syllable. The verb produce, however, is stressed on the second syllable, [prəˈdjuːs].

productivity The noun productivity, frequently used in industrial contexts, relates to efficiency or rate of production; it is not synonymous with output, which denotes the amount produced: 

- a productivity bonus. 

The installation of new machinery will increase the company's productivity; employing more workers will only increase its output.

professional The adjective professional is applied to people who are engaged in a profession or who take part in a sport or other activity for gain: 

- doctors, lawyers, and other professional people. 
- a professional golfer/actor/writer/musician. 

The noun professional is used to denote such people.

In general usage the word professional, in the sense of 'person engaged in a profession', may refer to any career that requires advanced learning and/or special training, such as law, medicine, theology, accountancy, engineering, teaching, nursing, and the armed forces. Many users object to the wider application of the term to include other middle-class occupations: 

- a marketing professional 
- sales professionals 
- recruitment professionals.

Note the spelling of the word professional, which has one f, and -ss.

professor This word is sometimes misspelt. Note the single f, -ss-, and the -or ending.

proffer see offer or proffer?

proficient The adjective proficient is followed by the preposition in or at: 

- Applicants must be proficient in [or at] French and German.

profile The noun profile is widely used in the expression keep a low profile, meaning 'be inconspicuous or unobtrusive' or 'avoid attention or publicity': 

- The group has kept a low profile since the arrest of its leader. This usage is disliked by some.

- Two adjectival compounds, low-profile and high-profile, have developed from this use: 

  - a low-profile investigation 
  - The star has lived a low-profile existence since the scandal appeared in the press.

See also visible.

The noun profile is also used alone in a further extension of this sense: 

- She [Joan Bakewell] is credited with raising the profile of arts coverage on television (Sunday Times). 
- You can't risk loss of profile, market share, and media appeal (The Bookseller).

The word profile is also occasionally used as a verb, meaning 'construct a profile of': 

- The new leader has been profiled in most of the leading newspapers.

profoundly deaf Profoundly deaf is the preferred modern term to describe a person who is both deaf and unable to speak: 

- A special school for the profoundly deaf. It replaces such former terms as deaf-mute and deaf-and-dumb, which are now avoided because of their negative connotations.

prognosis see diagnosis or prognosis?

program or programme? Both these words may be used as nouns or verbs. In British English the spelling programme is restricted to the computing sense of 'provide with a series of coded instructions': 

- a computer programme 
- to program a computer.

Program is also the American spelling of the word programme.

The noun programme has a variety of senses and uses, such as 'broadcast', 'list', 'plan', 'schedule': 

- a television programme 
- a theatre programme 
- the programme for tonight's concert 
- a research programme 
- a housing programme 
- the programme of events.

The verb programme means 'plan', 'schedule', or 'cause to conform to particular instructions', though some object to this usage: 

- The new road is programmed for completion next spring. 
- He has been programmed to respond in this way.

In British English the final m of program is doubled before -ed, -ing, -er, and -able, in Amer-
ican English programmed, programming, etc., are sometimes spelt with a single m.

The spelling programme was adopted from the French in the 19th century; program, which is now regarded as an Americanism, was the original spelling of the word in British English.

progressive tense The progressive (or continuous) tense describes those forms of verbs that describe an ongoing or unfinished action: • We were driving towards London. • They are deceiving themselves. Note that some verbs cannot be used in the progressive tense: • I am having black hair.

prohibit see FORBID or PROHIBIT?

project The word project, as a noun, meaning ‘scheme or plan’, is usually pronounced [prəˈekt]. The alternative [prəˈekt] is sometimes heard but is avoided by careful users.

The verb project, meaning ‘project’ or ‘estimate for the future’, is pronounced [prəˈekt].

pro-life The adjective pro-life is used to describe an organization, movement, etc., that supports the right to the maintenance of the life of the unborn. Those with pro-life views are in favour of limitations on the availability of legal abortions and a ban on experiments on human embryos: • The controversial Human Fertilisation and Embryo Bill faces new dissent from pro-life MPs (The Guardian).

• Pro-life is considered by many people to be a euphemism for anti-abortion. The term pro-choice, describing the opposite point of view, may be considered a euphemism for pro-abortion: • The pro-choice movement believes that women have a right to choose whether to have an abortion or not.

prolific The adjective prolific means ‘very productive’; it is applied to the person or thing that produces rather than to what is produced: • A prolific author, she writes two or three new novels every year.

• Many people object to the use of prolific as a synonym for ‘abundant’ or ‘numerous’: • Her prolific novels deal with a wide range of subjects.

prone see LIABLE or LIKELY?; PROSTATE, PRONE or SUPINE?

pronouns Pronouns are words that are used to replace nouns or noun phrases to refer to something or someone: • I • she • him • it • you • they, etc. The main difficulty that arises with pronouns is in the use of the personal pronoun, where many people are confused between the subject and object forms. Such phrases as: • Everything comes to he who waits. • It was up to Julia and I, though incorrect, are frequently used. Remember that after verbs and prepositions, the object pronoun (me, him, her, us, them) should be used: • Everything comes to him who waits. • It was up to Julia and me. The confusion can be resolved by mentally changing the sentence slightly: • Things come to him [not he]. • It was up to me [not I]. Before verbs the subject pronouns (I, he, she, we, they) should be used: • I [not me] and my friend will come. • She [not her] and her colleague are arguing.

See also I or ME. IT, THEM.

pronunciation The recommended pronunciation of English words found in dictionaries and grammar books is usually what is known as RP or Received Pronunciation, which more or less represents the speech of educated middle-class people from the South-East of England. Until comparatively recently, RP was regarded as 'correct' and other pronunciations were sometimes thought of as, if not actually incorrect, at least inferior. Most people now accept that there is no one standard form of English pronunciation which is correct. There is great regional variety in the United Kingdom and further variations in the speech of other English-speaking countries, and there is nothing incorrect about a pronunciation that is standard to a particular community or region.

• It is perfectly valid, then, to say [bæθ] instead of [bæθ]. If one comes from northern England, or for an American to say [mɛθ] instead of [mɛθ]. There is, however, still the possibility of mispronunciations, where a certain pronunciation is not an accepted regional variation and would gener-
propeller

ally be regarded as a mistake, for example, pronou
ncing gist as [gst] instead of [jst]. It should also be noted, though, that pronunciation is not sta
tic; it changes over the years and new pronun-
ciations which were originally resisted by careful
speakers sometimes eventually become the stan-
dard form.

A frequent mistake is to misspell pronunciation
as pronunciation. The recommended pronunciation
is [prəʊnəʊˈʃən], not [prəʊnəˈnəʊʃən].

See also LAW AND ORDER and other indi-
vidual entries.

propeller This word for a rotating device
with blades is usually spelt with the ending
-er, though -or is occasionally found.

proper nouns see CAPITAL LETTERS: NOUNS.

prophecy or prophesy? These spellings
and pronunciations are sometimes con-
cfused. The noun meaning ‘prediction’ is
spelt prophecy and pronounced [proˈfɪs].
The verb meaning ‘utter predictions’ is
spelt prophesy and pronounced [proˈfəs].

* Advice and advise are a similar noun-verb com-
   bination, spelt with a -c for the noun and an -s for
   the verb.

proportion The noun proportion denotes a
ratio; it is best avoided where part, number,
some, etc., would be adequate or more ap-
propriate: • The proportion of female
students to male students has increased. •
Some [not A proportion] of his friends are
unemployed.

* Such phrases as a small(er) proportion and a
   larger proportion may be replaced by few, less,
   many, more, etc.; • many [not a large proportion]
   of our employees • less [not a smaller proportion]
   of their money.

Some people also dislike the use of the plural
noun proportions in place of size or dimensions: •
Men of his proportions have difficulty finding
clothes that fit. • They set sail in a ship of enor-
mous proportions.

proportional or proportionate? The ad-
jectives proportional and proportionate are
virtually synonymous in the sense of ‘in propor-
tion’: • a proportionate [or propor-
tional] increase in spending • the cooking time
is proportionate [or proportionate] to the size of
the joint of meat.

* in the phrase proportional representation, de-
noting a type of electoral system, the adjective
proportional cannot be replaced by proportionate.

proposal or proposition? Both these
nouns can mean ‘something that is pro-
posed, suggested, or put forward for con-
sideration’, but they are not always in-
terchangeable: • the government’s latest
proposal • That’s an interesting
proposition/proposal. • an insurance proposal
• a business proposition.

* The two words have other specific senses that
should not be confused: a proposal is an offer of
marriage; a proposition is an invitation to extra-
marital sex. The verb proposition usually relates to
this meaning of the noun (and is much more
common than the noun in this sense): • He
propositioned his secretary; it should not be used
in place of propose.

Some people dislike the informal use of the
noun proposition in the sense of ‘person’, ‘thing’;
etc.; • The new manager is a formidable propo-
sition. • Recycling may not be an economic propo-
sition, in both these examples the adjectival
phrase could be replaced by the adjective alone.

proprietary Note the spelling of this word,
which is used to refer to goods sold under a
particular trade name, especially the second
r, the ic, and the -ary ending. The a is not
always sounded in speech.

pro rata The Latin expression pro rata is
used in formal contexts to mean ‘in propor-
tion to an amount’: • a part-time job at a
salary of £20,000 per year paid pro rata.

* The expression pro rata is pronounced [prɔ
ˈrətə].

proscribe see PRESCRIBE or PROSCRIBE?

prosecute see PERSECUTE or PROSECUTE?

prospective see PERSPECTIVE or PROSPECTIVE?

prostate or prostate? The word prostate
refers to a gland around the neck of the
bladder in men and other male mammals: •
He’s going into hospital to have his prostate
(gland) removed.

* It should not be confused with the adjective
prostrate, which means ‘lying face downwards’,
‘exhausted’, or ‘overcome’. • He stepped over
the prostrate body of the prisoner. • They were
prostrate with anguish.

The word prostrate is also used as a verb. The
adjective is stressed on the first syllable; the verb
is stressed on the second syllable.

prostrate, prone or supine? Prostrate and
prone mean ‘lying face downwards’; supine

means 'lying face upwards'. In these senses the adjectives *prone* and *supine* are largely restricted to formal or literary usage, or to contexts where the distinction between 'face downwards' and 'face upwards' is particularly important or relevant. Elsewhere, the adjective *prostrate* (with its additional meanings of 'exhausted' or 'overcome': see *prostate* or *prostrate?) is more frequent than *prone* and may also be used in place of *supine* or in the general sense of 'lying flat'. • *She lay prostrate with exhaustion*.

**protagonist** Some people object to the frequent use of the noun protagonist to denote a supporter, especially a leading or notable supporter, of a cause, movement, idea, political party, etc.: • *The Bush regime has been the chief protagonist in calls for action against maverick states*. • *I would find myself a protagonist of a movement to introduce sanctions on those who do not use these established trade tools (The Bookbeller)*. In such contexts *protagonist* may be better replaced by an appropriate synonym, such as *champion, advocate, or proponent*.

* • The traditional meaning of *protagonist* is 'the leading or principal character in a play, story, etc.': • *Wheeler and Webb then added a third series, starting with 'Murder Gone to Earth' (1937), ... in which the protagonist was a country doctor (Daily Telegraph)*. In this sense it should not be necessary to qualify the noun with such adjectives as *chief, main, leading, principal, etc.*

**protect** The verb *protect* is followed by the preposition from or against: • *This vaccination will protect you from [or against] a number of tropical diseases*.

**protégé** see *prodigy* or *protégé?*

**protein** Note the spelling of this word, especially the -en ending. It is an exception to the *y before e* rule (see *spelling s*).

**pro tem** The expression *pro tem* is a shortened form of the Latin phrase *pro tempore*, meaning 'for the time being' or 'temporarily': • *Mr Jones will take charge of the sales department pro tem*.

**proved or proven?** *Proved* is the past tense of the verb *prove* and the usual form of its past participle in British English: • *They have proved their innocence*. • As a variant form of the past participle, *proven* is largely restricted to the Scottish legal phrase *not proven*. In British English it is more frequently used as an adjective: • *a proven remedy* • *proven skills* • *a proven liar*.

The accepted pronunciation of the word *proven* is [prōvən], although the pronunciation [prəvən] is also heard from time to time, particularly in the Scottish legal phrase *not proven*.

**proverbial** The cliché *the proverbial ... is often used when (part of) a proverb or other idiomatic expression is quoted: • *It's like taking the proverbial horse to water*. • *We found ourselves up the proverbial creek*.

• The use of the adjective *proverbial* as a synonym for 'famous' or 'notorious' is disliked by some: • *the proverbial British weather*.

**provided or providing** The expressions *provided (that)* and *providing (that)* mean 'on the condition that': • *You may have a dog provided/providing that you look after it yourself*.

• Some consider *provided (that)* more acceptable than *providing (that)*. The inclusion or omission of *that* is optional in most contexts.

The use of *provided or providing* in place of *if* is usually unnecessary and sometimes wrong: • *I'll clean the windows this afternoon if provided/providing it doesn't rain*. • *We'll miss our train if not provided/providing we don't leave soon*.

**provident or providential?** These two adjectives, both used in formal contexts, should not be confused. *Provident* means 'showing or exercising foresight' or 'thrifty'; *providential* means 'fortunate' or 'relating to divine providence': • *They should have been more provident with their resources*. • *A providential shower of rain brought the game to an end*.

**providing** see *provided or providing*?

**psychedelic** The adjective *psychedelic*, describing hallucinogenic drugs or their effects, is sometimes spelt *psychodelic*. This spelling is acknowledged by some dictionaries but is unacceptable to many users, on the grounds that the adjective is derived from the word *psyche* rather than the prefix *psycho*.

• The use of the adjective *psychedelic* in the sense of 'vividly coloured or patterned' should be restricted to informal contexts.

**psychiatrist, psychoanalyst** see *psychologist, psychiatrist, psychoanalyst or psychotherapist*?
psychological moment The phrase psychological moment, of German origin, is generally used with reference to the most appropriate time to produce the desired effect: • He waited until she had digested the news of his promotion and then, at the psychological moment, he proposed to her.

• This usage derives from a misinterpretation of the German original, which would have been more accurately translated as psychological momentum.

The expression should not be used in place of turning point, nick of time, etc., or in contexts where the noun moment would be better qualified by a different adjective, such as crucial, critical, exact, or precise: • She lost her concentration at the critical [not psychological] moment.

psychologist, psychiatrist, psychoanalyst or psychotherapist? These words are sometimes confused. A psychologist is a person who studies psychology, the study of the human mind and reasons for human behaviour. A psychiatrist is a doctor who is concerned with psychiatry, the branch of medicine concerned with the treatment of mental illness. A psychoanalyst is someone who treats people with mental disorders by means of psychoanalysis, i.e., by bringing patients’ mental processes into consciousness by allowing them to talk freely about themselves, especially their early childhood experiences. A psychotherapist is someone who treats people with mental, emotional, or psychosomatic disorders using psychological methods.

publicly This word is frequently misspelt; there is no -k before the suffix -ly.

• This word does not conform to the normal rule that adjectives ending in -ic have an adverb ending in -ically, as in tragic-tragically.

pudding see DESSERT, SWEET, PUDDING or AFTERS?

punctilious or punctual? These two adjectives should not be confused. Punctilious is the more formal of the two and means ‘scrupulously correct’ or ‘attentive to detail’; punctual means ‘prompt; exactly on time.’ • He is very punctilious about etiquette.

• If you’re called for an interview, be punctual.

punctuation The primary purpose of punctuation is to clarify the writer’s meaning. In speech the meaning is conveyed by the use of emphasis and pauses; punctuation has to serve the same purpose with written language. Lack of punctuation or incorrect punctuation can lead to misunderstanding and ambiguity.

• The importance of punctuation in conveying meaning can be illustrated by the various levels of punctuation in the following sentences: • My son, who is a psychiatrist, said Geoff is insane. The sense here is that one of my sons was commenting on Geoff’s mental state. • My son, who is a psychiatrist, said Geoff is insane. The suggestion here is that I have only one son and he was commenting on Geoff’s mental state. • ‘My son, who is a psychiatrist,’ said Geoff, ‘is insane.’ Here Geoff is commenting on his son’s mental state.

Punctuation is sometimes a matter of rules and sometimes a matter of style or personal preference. A heavily punctuated passage of writing is unpleasant to read and, in general, it is preferable to use the minimum amount of punctuation consistent with conveying the meaning clearly.

See also APOSTROPHE; BRACKETS; CAPITAL LETTERS; COLON; COMMA; DASH; ELLIPSIS; EXCLAMATION MARK; FULL STOP; HYPHEN; ITALICS; PARAGRAPHS; QUESTION MARK; QUOTATION MARKS; SEMICOLONS; SOLIDUS.

pupil or student? In British English the noun pupil denotes a child at school or a person receiving instruction from an expert; a student is a person who studies at an institute of further or higher education, such as a college or university: • a pupil at the local infant school • a painting by one of Michelangelo’s pupils • while she was a student at Oxford.

• influenced by American usage, the application of the noun student to schoolchildren, especially the older pupils at a secondary school, is becoming increasingly frequent in British English.

purposely or purposefully? Purposely means ‘on purpose; intentionally’ and usually refers to the reason for doing something; purposefully means ‘in a determined way; with a definite purpose in mind’ and usually indicates the manner in which something is done: • He purposely left his umbrella behind. • She strode purposefully into the room. The two adverbs are sometimes confused.

pusillanimous. The adjective pusillanimous, used in formal contexts to mean ‘timid’ or ‘cowardly’, is sometimes misspelt.
Note the -ll-, the single -n-, and the -our ending.

**putrefy** This word, used in formal English to mean 'decompose' or 'rot', is sometimes misspelt. Note the ending -fy (like **stupify**), in spite of the spelling of the related word **putrid**.

**pygmy** or **pigmy**† Both of these spellings are acceptable, although the y spelling is preferred by some users as it shows the word's Greek origins, **pygmaios** 'dwarfish'.

Pygmy should be written with an initial capital letter when it is used to refer to a member of one of the tribes of equatorial Africa.

**pyjamas** or **pajamas**† The spelling **pyjamas** is used in British English and **pajamas** is the usual form in American English. The word comes originally from the Urdu and Persian **pay** (meaning 'leg') and **jama** (meaning 'clothing').
quality The word quality is often used adjectively as a synonym for ‘excellent’ or ‘of superior quality’: quality goods, a quality newspaper. Some people object to this usage on the grounds that the noun quality does not always denote excellence: the quality of a product, service, etc., may be good, mediocre, or bad.

quality time The phrase quality time is a vogue expression applied to time spent in personal relationships, e.g. by working parents with their children, especially a comparatively small amount of time exclusively devoted to the needs and interests of the children: an hour’s quality time with the twins before they go to bed. Objections to the phrase have become more muted as it has been absorbed into mainstream English.

quantum leap Many people object to the frequent use of the term quantum leap (or quantum jump) to denote a great change or advance: The administration must make the ‘quantum leap’ to negotiations with the new rebel government.

- The term is borrowed from the field of physics, where it refers to a sudden transition that is discernible but far from great.

quarrelled or quarreled? In British English the correct spelling of the word is quarrelled: They quarrelled over a woman. In American English, however, the accepted spelling is quarreled: We should not have quarreled over something so minor.

quasi The Latin word quasi, meaning ‘as if’, may be combined with adjectives, in the sense of ‘virtual’, ‘seemingly’, ‘partly’, or ‘almost’, or with nouns, in the sense of ‘resembling’, ‘so-called’, or ‘apparent’: quasi-religious, quasi-official, quasi-republics.

- The hyphen is sometimes omitted but the words are never written as a one-word compound.

Quasi may be pronounced [kwʌsiː], [kwɛː] or [kwæziː].

quay This word for ‘landing place’ is sometimes misspelt. Although pronounced like key, note its totally different spelling.

quarrelling The use of quarrelling as an informal, often derogatory, synonym for ‘homosexual’, dates back to the early 20th century. In recent years it has been replaced by the word GAY, which is not derogatory.

- Although the term quarrelling sounds dated in modern usage when used by a heterosexual, it is increasingly used in a non-derogatory manner by homosexuals amongst themselves.

query The verb query is best avoided where ask or question would be more appropriate: Where do you live? she asked not queried.

- The word query has connotations of doubt; a query is a question prompted by doubt; to query is to cast doubt on: They accepted his statement without query. We queried the bill.

quest The noun quest is followed by the preposition for or of: The never-ending quest for the truth. She travelled the world in quest of her missing brother.

question see Beg the question; Leading question; Question mark; Questions; Rhetorical question.

question mark The primary use of the question mark is as a substitute for a full stop at the end of a sentence that is a direct question: Where are you going? and at the end of a quoted question, within the quotation marks: Where are you going? he asked. It is not used for an indirect question: He asked me where I was going.

- A question mark may appear after a question that is not a complete sentence: Beer? Wine? Red or white? It may also appear after a sentence which is not actually in question form but where the rising intonation of speech would indicate a question: You can’t mean that? She’s really going to do it?

A question mark usually follows a request:
Could I possibly have a cup of tea? If the request is 
more of an instruction, especially if it is lengthy, it 
normally ends with a full stop, not a question 
mark: • Would all ladies who wish to travel to 
the gardens by coach kindly remain here for a 
short time.

If a verb of thinking follows a direct question it 
takes a question mark unless the question is in the 
past, where it has the force of reported speech: • 
Where are they now? I wondered. • Where were they 
now? I wondered. One would not write: • Where 
are they now? I wonder, although it is occasionally 
possible for a question mark to appear in the 
middle of a sentence: • The question Why me? 
is one that cannot be answered. This is disliked by 
some people who insist that, as a question mark 
have the force of a full stop, it cannot appear except 
at the end of a sentence, or in quotation marks or 
parentheses.

A question mark can be used to show that a fact 
is obviously true: • Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914). It 
is sometimes also used, humorously or ironically, 
to express doubt: • my devoted (?) little brother, 
but only in very informal contexts. Similarly, 
doubled question marks and the combination of 
question marks and exclamation marks should be 
avoided in formal writing.

questionnaire This word is sometimes 
misspelt. Note the -n-, unlike the single 
n in millionaire.

• The traditional pronunciation of the first syllable 
was [kwest] but in contemporary usage the first 
syllable is generally pronounced as in question: 
[kwestəˈnəːr].

questions A question is a word, phrase, or 
sentence that asks for information and 
requires an answer (see also RHETORICAL 
QUESTION). Questions often begin with 
how, what, when, where, which, who, or 
why; • How did you find out? • Where 
is it? • Which one? • Why?, or with an 
inserted verb: • Is he old enough? • Are 
you hungry? • Must she? • Will the car be 
ready tomorrow? Direct questions are al-
ways followed by a QUESTION MARK.

• Indirect questions, which occur in REPORTED 
speech, do not have a question mark at the 
end: • She asked me what I was doing.

Other words, phrases, and sentences may be-
come questions by the addition of a question mark 
in written or printed texts or by INTONATION in 
speech: • You've sold it? • Coffee?

A tag question is an inverted form of the verb 
be, have, do, can, must, etc., that is added to a 
statement. Usually a positive statement is followed 
by a negative tag question, and vice versa: • He's 
tall, isn't he? • You work in a bank, don't you? • 
She can't swim, can she? • The clock hasn't 
stopped, has it? Tag questions usually require a 
'yes' or 'no' answer but they are sometimes rheto-
rical. A positive statement followed by a positive 
tag question may be more of an exclamation than 
a question: • They want higher wages, do they?

Negative tag questions usually contain the con-
traction -n't; the full form not is heard only in very 
formal contexts or in dialectal English: • You left 
the car unlocked, did you not?

queue see CUE or QUEUE.

quick The use of the word quick as an 
adverb should generally be avoided in formal 
contexts: • Please reply quickly [not 
quick] to avoid disappointment. • Come quick!

• The comparative and superlative forms quicker 
and quickest are more informal than more quickly 
and most quickly: • Some plants grow more 
quickly/quicker than others. • The German athlete 
raced the quickest/most quickly. Quickier may be 
prefixed to more quickly when the adverb is 
preceded by any: • Can you drive any quicker?

The use of the adverb quick in fixed combina-
tions, such as quick-drying paint, quick-frozen 
food, etc., is acceptable in all contexts.

quid pro quo A quid pro quo is something 
given to someone in return for something 
else: • They felt obliged to write research 
papers as a kind of quid pro quo for their fees. • 
to exchange information on a quid pro quo 
basis.

• The phrase quid pro quo is Latin in origin, 
meaning 'something for something'. Its English 
plural is quid pro quos.

quiet or quieten? Both these verbs may be 
used to mean 'soothe, calm, or allay' or 
'make or become quiet'; in the second of 
these senses the verb is often followed by 
down.

• In British English the verb quiet is largely re-
stricted to the first sense and formal usage and 
quieten to the second: • We must try to quiet his 
douts. • The children quietened down when their 
mother appeared. In American English the verb 
quiet is preferred in both senses.

quiet or quitted? Either word may be used 
as the past tense and past participle of the 
verb quit.

• In British English quitted is preferred by some
users in formal contexts, but the American variant quit is becoming increasingly frequent, particularly in informal contexts: • They quit. (quit the building without delay); • He has quit. (quit his job).

quite In the sense of ‘completely’, ‘totally’, or ‘entirely’, the adverb quite is generally used with adjectives that cannot be qualified by very: • a quite excellent result; • a quite unnecessary remark. It is quite impossible! • The ring is quite worthless. Used with other adjectives, quite usually has the meaning ‘somewhat’, ‘fairly’, or ‘rather’: • They are quite useful. • The film is quite frightening.

In some contexts, however, the adverb may be ambiguous: • The room is quite clean. • The bucket is quite full.

In the sense of ‘fairly’, the adverb quite usually precedes the indefinite article: • quite an easy question; • quite a long time. The adjectival use of the expression quite Allan, meaning ‘remarkable’ or ‘exceptional’, is best restricted to informal contexts: • She has quite a collection. • That was quite a meal.

quitted see quit or quit?
race  The term race, denoting a particular people or racial group, is avoided by many users because of its controversial associations. Preferred terms include ethnic group.

racism or racialism? Both these nouns are used in the sense of 'racial prejudice or discrimination', racism being more frequent than racialism in modern usage: • The company was accused of racism in its recruitment policy.

rack or wrack? These two words are sometimes confused. Rack is used for a framework for storing or displaying things: • a luggage rack • a shoe rack. Rack is also used for the torturing frame: • on the rack.

As a verb rack means 'cause to suffer pain': • racked with uncertainty; one also racks one's brains. The expression rack and ruin, 'a state of collapse', may also be spelt wrack and ruin, nerve-racking, 'causing great anxiety and tension!', has the variant spelling nerve-wracking. Wrack is seaweed.

racket or racquet? Either spelling is acceptable for describing the implement used in sport for striking the ball: • tennis racket/racquet • the game of racket/racquets.

• The spelling racket has the additional noun senses 'loud noise': • That music is a terrible racket, and 'illegal business': • involved in a drugs racket.

rage  The word rage has been used to form a variety of compounds in recent years denoting outbursts of anger at some inconvenience of modern life or the incon siderate behaviour of others in a particular situation: • road rage • air rage • web rage. As vogue terms, these phrases are best restricted to informal contexts.

rail  The verb rail is followed by the preposition at or against: • Protesters railed at [or against] the reform of the abortion law.

rain, reign, or rein? These spellings are sometimes confused. Rain refers to water falling from clouds or similar downpours: • The rain eased at noon. Reign refers to the rule of a monarch or other leader, while rein describes one of the leather straps used to control a horse: • the reign of the present queen • pull on the reins.

The noun rein is also used in such expressions as give free rein to 'allow freedom to' and keep a tight rein on 'control strictly'. The verb reign means 'exercise royal authority': • King Henry VIII reigned from 1509 to 1547. Reign is also used to describe a powerful prevalent power or influence: • the reign of terror in Uganda under Idi Amin • Peace has reigned in Europe since 1945.

rainbow coalition  The phrase rainbow coalition is a vogue expression of American origin, denoting a political alliance of minority groups (such as ethnic minorities, pressure groups, or minor political parties):

• a rainbow coalition of New Agers, peace campaigners, and animal rights activists.

raise or raze? The verb raise means 'move to a higher position': • He raised the trophy high; raze means 'destroy completely'. • The city was razed to the ground. The two spellings should not be confused.

• The verb raze has the variant spelling rase. Raze is more frequent than rase in modern usage.

raise or rise? Both these verbs mean 'move to a higher or upright position' or 'increase'. Raise is transitive, rise is intransitive: • She raised her arm. • They may raise the price. • I watched the smoke rise. • The temperature was rising.

• The verb raise is also used in the sense of 'bring up', 'rear', or 'breed': • He was raised in Cornwall. • We raise Highland cattle. (Some people regard this usage as an Americanism.) Rise, an irregular verb, has a number of specialized uses: • She rose at dawn. • The dough has risen.

The noun rise means 'increase': • a pay rise • a rise in unemployment. In American English raise is used in place of rise to denote an increase in salary, wages, etc.: • He asked for a raise; this usage is
raison d'être

sometimes found in British English, but is disliked by many.

See also ANSE or RISE?; RAISE or RAZE?

raison d'être The phrase raison d'être, of French origin, is used in English to denote a reason or justification for existence; it is best avoided where reason, explanation, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • Helping the bereaved is the organisation's raison d'être. • The Prime Minister explained the reason [not raison d'être] for the government's change of policy.

♦ Note the spelling of the phrase, particularly the circumflex accent on the first e. The anglicized pronunciation is (razən de'trē).

rang see RANGED, RANG or RUNG?

rapt or wrapped? These spellings are sometimes confused. The adjective rapt means 'engrossed or absorbed': • rapt with wonder • They listened with rapt attention.
Wrapped is the past tense of the verb wrap, meaning 'enfold': • She wrapped the shawl round the baby.

♦ Note that wrapped can also be used figuratively: • He is completely wrapped up in his work.

rara avis The phrase rara avis, denoting a rare or unusual person or thing, is often better replaced by the noun rarity: • The dedicated employee who is prepared to work long hours without reward is a rara avis.

♦ Of Latin origin, the phrase literally means 'rare bird'.

The usual pronunciation of rara avis is [rǎrə aˈviːs] or [rərə ayəs].

rarefy This word, meaning 'make rare or less dense', is sometimes misspelt. Note the -efy ending, unlike purify, intensify, etc.

The variant spelling rarify is acknowledged by some dictionaries but is best avoided.

♦ The past participle rarefied, used as an adjective meaning 'exalted', 'exclusive', or 'thin', is the most frequent form: • rarefied atmosphere.

rat The word rat has been in common use for many years as an insult for someone who has behaved despicably or deceitfully, but in recent times it has enjoyed renewed currency in a number of combined forms. Some, such as • small rat (for a person who spends many hours shopping) or • love rat (for a man who cheats on his partner), are broadly contemptuous in tone, while others, such as • rug rat (for a small child), are grudgingly affectionate.

rateable or ratable? Both spellings of this word are acceptable, but rateable is preferred by some users: • rateable value. See SPELLING 3.

rather The adverb rather may be used with would or had, but would is more frequent in modern usage, had being rather formal: • They would had rather watch television than listen to the radio. • She would had rather you stayed at home.

♦ The contraction 'd, which may represent either would or had, is often used in informal contexts: • I'd rather write than telephone.

See also SHOULD or WOULD?

The substitution of rather than for than after a comparative is wrong: • He is more interested in the customs and traditions of Elizabethan times than [not rather than] in the political events of the period.

Some people object to the use of rather before a or an when the following noun is qualified by an adjective, preferring it's a rather expensive car to it's rather an expensive car. If the noun is not qualified by an adjective, rather must precede the indefinite article: • He's rather a coward.

ravage or ravish? These two verbs should not be confused. Ravage means 'cause great damage to' and 'devastate'; ravish means 'delight or enrapture': • The country was ravaged by war. • They were ravished by the beauty of the sunset.

♦ Ravish has the additional meaning of 'rape' or 'carry off by force': • She was ravished by her captors.

Both verbs are largely restricted to formal contexts. The word ravage is also used as a noun, in such phrases as the ravages of time, and the word ravish in the adjectival form ravishing: • You look ravishing in that dress.

raze see RAISE or RAZE?

re The use of the preposition re, meaning 'with reference to' or 'in the matter of', should be restricted to the heading or opening of a business letter: • Re: Interest rates for personal loans. • Re your advertisement in Country Life.

♦ In other contexts re can usually be replaced by about, concerning, etc.: • I am producing a documentary about [not re] the problems faced by single parents. • We have received many com-
plaints concerning [not re] the proposed route for the new bypass. Re is usually pronounced to rhyme with bee. The pronunciation [ray] is also heard from time to time, but is incorrect. See also COMMEROALESE.

re- The prefix re-, meaning 'again', should be followed by a hyphen in compounds that might be confused with existing or more familiar words. Such verbs as re-ound, re-lese, and re-sign (meaning 'sound again', 'lease again', and 'sign again'), for example, are thus distinguished from the verbs reound, release, and resign.

See also REBOUND or RE-BOUND; RECOUNT or RE-COUNT?; RECOVER or RE-COVER?; RECREATION or RE-CREATION?; REFORM or RE-FORM?; RELAY or RE-LAY?; REPRESENT or RE-PRESENT?; RESORT or RE-SORT?

The use of a hyphen in the words re-educate, re-election, re-entry, re-erect, re-examine, etc., is optional (see also HYPHEN 1). Some people prefer to retain the hyphen in such words as re-invent, re-arrest, etc., to avoid confusion with rein, rear, etc.

Careful users avoid the tautological addition of the adverbs back and again to verbs that begin with the prefix re-:
She returned [not returned back] to England in 1945. I refer you to the opening paragraph [not I refer you back]. We are redecorating the lounge [not redecorating again]. He made me rewrite the article [not rewrite again]. The use of again in the last example would imply that the article had been written more than twice: He was not satisfied with my second draft and made me rewrite the article again.

reaction The noun reaction, which denotes a spontaneous or automatic response, is best avoided where reply, response, answer, opinion, etc., would be more appropriate: On hearing the alarm his reaction was one of panic. We had hoped for a more favourable response [not reaction] from the committee. Please study these proposals and give me your opinion [not reaction].

A reaction can only occur in response to something else; the word should not be used in place of effect, influence, etc.: What was the effect [not reaction] of the news on her family?, but: What was the reaction of her family to the news?

real Many people object to the frequent use of the adjective real in place of important, serious, etc., or simply for emphasis: a real achievement • a real problem • the real facts • in real life.

The adverbial use of real in the sense of 'really' or 'very' is an American dialectal usage: He's real clever.

real or reel? Real means 'existent', 'actual', or 'verifiable': The country in which the story is set is not real. The real reason for her resignation came out later. It should not be confused with reel, which describes a revolving device of some kind or, as a verb, means 'stagger' or 'whirl': A fisherman's reel. He reeled with shock.

realism or reality? Reality is the state of being real, or the state of things as they really are: Daydreams are an escape from reality. We must face reality. Realism is the acceptance of reality, a practical rather than idealistic attitude of mind: Problems like this must be approached with realism and common sense.

In art, literature, etc., the term realism denotes a style in which things are depicted as they really are, as opposed to abstract art, romantic literature, etc.

realistic The frequent use of the adjective realistic as a synonym for 'sensible', 'practical', 'reasonable', etc., is disliked by many users: a realistic proposal • a realistic alternative • a realistic offer.

reality see REALISM OR REALITY?

reality TV The phrase reality TV refers to those television programmes that make entertainment out of situations which imitate the challenges of real life as closely as possible, the camera appearing to cave-drop upon its subjects. A relatively recent development in popular television, reality TV remains a somewhat jargonistic term.

really The excessive use of the adverb really is best avoided, even in informal contexts. Really can often be replaced by a different intensifier, such as very, extremely, thoroughly, truly, etc., or omitted altogether: It was really late when they arrived and we were really worried. Wait until the paint is really dry. I really enjoyed that holiday. She really hates her job.

reason Careful users regard the tautologi-
cal construction the reason is/was because as wrong, preferring the reason is/was that or a simpler paraphrase using because alone: • The reason for the delay is that [not because] there are road works in the town centre. • The reason I opened the window was that [not because] there was a wasp in the room. • I opened the window because there was a wasp in the room.

Similar objections are raised to the use of such constructions as the reason is due to, the reason was an account of, etc.

The phrase the reason why is acceptable to some users but disliked by others: • the reason why he resigned. In such contexts why may be replaced by that or omitted altogether; if a noun can be substituted for the verb, the phrase the reason for may be used instead: • the reason (that) he resigned • the reason for his resignation.

rebound or re-bound? These two spellings are sometimes confused. The verb rebound means 'spring back': • The ball rebounded. Re-bound, spelt with a hyphen, is the past tense and past participle of the verb re-bind (or rebind), meaning 'bind again': • The book has been re-bound.

rebound or redound? Rebound means 'spring back': • The ball rebounded. • The success of the project threatened to rebound upon the government. In the figurative sense rebound is sometimes used in place of re-bound. However, most careful users prefer to restrict rebound to the sense 'contribute or lead to': • Your skilful performance rebounded to your benefit.

Only rebound is used as a noun: • The rebound bounced off Smith's arm. • marry someone on the rebound.

receipt This word, meaning 'written confirmation that something has been paid or received', is sometimes misspelt. Note the -ei- spelling, and the silent p.

See also SPELLING S.

receive This word is often misspelt. Note the -ei- spelling, which conforms to the rule 'i before e except after c'.

See also SPELLING S.

recess The noun recess may be pronounced [riːs] or [reːs]. The first pronunciation, with the stress on the second syllable, is preferred by some users of British English, but the second pronunciation, stressed on the first syllable, is becoming increasingly frequent.

reciprocal see MUTUAL, COMMON or RECIPROCAL.

reckon The use of the verb reckon in place of think, expressing a personal opinion, is best restricted to informal contexts: • He reckons the other team will win.

In the sense of 'consider' or 'regard', however, reckon is acceptable in all contexts: • She is reckoned to be one of the most talented musicians of her generation.

recoil The verb recoil is followed by the preposition from or at: • She recoiled from or at the prospect of meeting him again.

recommend This word, meaning 'praise or suggest as suitable', is often misspelt. Note the single c and -mm-.

reconnaissance This word, meaning 'exploration or survey of an area for military intelligence purposes', is often misspelt. Note the -mm- and -is-.

• Note also the spelling of the verb reconnaître meaning 'make a reconnaissance'.

recount or re-count? These two spellings are sometimes confused. The verb recount means 'narrate': • He recounted his experiences during the war. The verb re-count, with a hyphen, means 'count again', and the noun re-count, which is used more frequently than the verb, means 'second count': • to demand a re-count of the vote.

recourse, resort or resource? Similarities in the sense, usage, form, and pronunciation of these words may lead to confusion. All three can refer to a source of help or an expedient: • Violence was our only recourse/resort/resource.

• in the expressions have recourse/resort to and without recourse/resort to, recourse and resort are virtually interchangeable but cannot be replaced by resource. Recourse is the more frequent noun in such contexts, resort being used as a verb in similar constructions: • I hope he will not have recourse to violence. – I hope he will not resort to violence. • They settled the dispute without recourse to violence. – They settled the dispute without resorting to violence.

In the expression as a last resort/resource the nouns resort and resource are interchangeable but cannot be replaced by recourse. Resort is generally
considered to be the more idiomatic choice in such contexts: • She turned to violence as a last resort.

recover or re-cover? These two spellings are sometimes confused. Recover means 'regain'; • She recovered her health. Re-cover, with a hyphen, means 'give a new cover to': • The upholsterer re-covered the chair.

recreation or re-creation? The spellings of these words are sometimes confused. Recreation means 'relaxation; leisure (pursuit)': • a recreation ground. Re-creation, with a hyphen, is less frequently used and means 'a new creation': • the re-creation of the Wild West for the film set.

recuperate The verb recuperate, meaning 'recover', is sometimes misspelt, a common error being the substitution of -coup- for -cup-, as in the verb recoup.
• Note that the verb is always used intrinsically: • It will take him weeks to recuperate.

recur The word recur, meaning 'happen again', should never be followed by again: • Make sure this situation does not recur.

Red Indian see NATIVE AMERICAN.

redouble or reduplicate? The verb redouble means 'increase' or 'intensify': • We redoubled our efforts. The rarer and more formal verb reduplicate means 'repeat' or 'double'; it also has the specialized sense of 'repeat (a syllable)', as in the words bye-bye, papa, etc.
• Note that in general usage redouble does not refer to the act of doubling something.

rebound see REBOUND or REBOUND?

redundant Some people object to the frequent use of the adjective redundant in place of unnecessary, superfluous, irrelevant, unimportant, etc.: • Our second car will become redundant when my husband starts commuting by train. • The cancellation of the dinner dance made the baby-sitting problem redundant.

reduplicate see REDOUBLE or REDUPLICATE?

reek or wreak? Reek means 'stink' or 'smell strongly': • The flat reeked. • The affair reeked of state interference. It should not be confused with wreak, which means 'cause havoc' or 'inflict violence': • The storm wreaked havoc in the harbour.
• See also WROUGHT.

reel see REAL or REEL?

refer The verb refer is stressed on the second syllable; the final r is doubled before -ed, -ing, and -er. In the noun reference the stress shifts to the first syllable, and the second r is not doubled.
• See also SPELLING 1.

For the use of the adverb back with the verb refer see RE-

referee or umpire? Both nouns denote a person who ensures that a game is played according to the rules and settles any disputes that arise during the course of the game. A referee supervises such sports as football, boxing, etc.; an umpire supervises such sports as tennis, cricket, baseball, hockey, etc.
• A referee is also a person who supplies a professional or character reference for a job applicant, prospective tenant, etc. The noun umpire is not used in this sense.

referendum The noun referendum has two plural forms, referendums and referenda. Referendums is the more frequent in general usage: • Their proposed referendums on nuclear disarmament and the return of capital punishment will be welcomed by many.

reflective or reflexive? These two adjectives should not be confused. Reflective is used in the literal sense of 'reflecting light' or the figurative sense of 'thoughtful; contemplative': • a reflective stripe across the back of the jacket • in a reflective mood. Reflexive is a grammatical term (see REFLEXIVE): • reflexive verb • reflexive pronoun.

reflexive A reflexive verb is a transitive verb in which the subject and object are the same: • I washed myself. • She hid herself behind a tree. • He praised himself. • The directors awarded themselves large pay increases. The pronouns myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, oneself, ourselves, yourselves, and themselves are called reflexive pronouns.
• See also SELF; VERBS.

reform or re-form? These spellings are sometimes confused. The verb reform means 'change by improvement': • plans to reform the tax system. Re-form, with a hyphen, means 'form again': • After a lapse of ten years, the club decided to re-form.
refrigerator

Note the spelling of this word, particularly the -er in the middle and the -or at the end. There is no d in refrigerator, unlike the informal short form frig.

refute or deny? The verb refute means 'prove to be false'; deny means 'declare to be false': • He refuted their accusations by producing a receipt for the camera. • He denied their accusations but was unable to prove his innocence. The use of refute in place of deny is avoided by many careful users but nevertheless occurs with some frequency.

regard In the sense of 'consider' the verb regard should be used with the preposition in: • She regarded her mother as her friend. • This novel is regarded as the author's masterpiece. Compare CONSIDER.

The verb regard has a number of other senses and is also used in the prepositional phrase as regards, meaning 'with respect to', 'about', or 'concerning': • As regards your suggestion, the committee will discuss it at tomorrow's meeting.

As regards should not be confused with the phrases in regard to and the less frequent in regard to, used in similar contexts, in which the word regard is a noun and does not end in s. In mid-sentence these compound prepositions are often better replaced by about, concerning, or regarding.

The noun regard is used in a variety of other expressions. Have regard for means 'show consideration for': • They have no regard for her safety. The plural noun regards, meaning 'greetings', occurs in such expressions as with kind regards (used to close a letter) and give one's regards to: • Please give my regards to your daughter when you next see her.

regardless see IRRESPECTIVE.

registry office or register office? Both these terms are used to denote the place where civil marriages are conducted and where births, marriages, and deaths are recorded. Registry office is the more frequent term in general usage, register office being largely restricted to formal contexts.

regrettably or regretfully? These two adverbs are sometimes confused. Regrettably relates to something that causes regret; regretfully relates to somebody who feels regret: • This year's profits are regretfully low. • She regretfully turned down their offer.

regrettably, not regretfully, may be used to mean 'it is regrettable that': • Regrettably, the house does not have a garage. The increasing use of regretfully in place of regretfully in this sense may be due to confusion with HOPEFULLY, THANKFULLY, etc.

reign, rein see RAIN, REIGN or REIN?

reiterate The verb reiterate means 'repeat' or 'say or do repeatedly'; it should not be used with the adverb again (see also AGAIN): • The Prime Minister was simply reiterating the promises made in the party manifesto.

relation or relationship? Both these nouns may be used in the sense of 'connection' but they are not interchangeable in all contexts: • Is there any relation/relationship between unemployment and crime? • This evidence bears no relation [not relationship] to the case. • What is his relationship [not relation] to the deceased?

The noun relationship is preferred for human connections, relation for more abstract connections.

A similar distinction may be applied to the use of relationship and the plural noun relations in the sense of 'mutual feelings or dealings': • business relations • an intimate relationship • the government's relations with the unions • his relationship with his wife.

See also RELATION or RELATIVE.

relation or relative? Either noun may be used to denote a person connected to another by blood, marriage, or adoption: • Most of her relations/relatives are going to the wedding. • I have a distant relation/relative in Canada.

See also RELATION or RELATIONSHIP.

relative clause see CLAUSE, COMMA; THAT or WHICH?

relatively The adverb relatively implies comparison; many people object to its use as a synonym for 'fairly', 'somewhat', 'rather', etc., where there is no comparison: • After the heat of the kitchen the lounge felt relatively cool. • Our records are fairly [not relatively] up to date.

relay or re-lay? These two spellings are sometimes confused. The verb relay means 'pass on': • to relay a message. The verb re-lay, spelt with a hyphen, means 'lay again': • to re-lay a carpet.
- The past tense and past participle of relay is re-layed; the past tense and past participle of re-lay is re-laid.

The word relay is also used as a noun: • The switch is operated by a relay. • They worked in relays, in this usage, and in such phrases as relay race, relay is stressed on the first syllable. The verbs relay and re-lay may be stressed on either syllable; re-lay is sometimes stressed on both.

relevant This word is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the second e.

reliable or reliant? The adjective reliable means 'dependable' or 'able to be trusted': • a reliable car • Some of the author’s sources are not very reliable. The adjective reliant, meaning 'dependent', is chiefly used in the phrase be reliant on: • We were reliant on their assistance.

relocate The verb relocate, frequently used in business and industrial contexts, is widely regarded as a pretentious synonym for 'move': • the latest major firm to relocate to Basingstoke • Unemployment in the North is forcing many families to relocate.

remedial or remediable? Remedial means 'intended as a remedy'; remediable means 'able to be remedied': • remedial treatment • a remedial problem. The two adjectives should not be confused.

- Remedial is specifically applied to the teaching of slow learners: • remedial education • a remedial course.

Remediable is less frequent than its antonym remediable: • The damage is remediable.

Both adjectives are stressed on the second syllable, unlike the word remedy from which they are derived. Remedial is pronounced [ri'med'ıəl], remediable is pronounced [ri'med'ıəbl].

remembrance The noun remembrance, meaning 'the act of remembering', 'memory', or 'memento', is often misspelt, the most frequent error being the substitution of -ber- for -br-, as in the verb remember. Note also the -ance ending.

remind The verb remind is followed by the preposition of in the sense 'cause to think of': • The smell of pine forests reminds me of my childhood in Scotland. It is followed by about or of in the sense 'cause to remember': • She reminded me about [or of] the promise I had made.

remiscient This word is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the -isc-, as in scent.

remission or remittance? Both these nouns are derived from the verb remit. Remittance is largely restricted to official contexts, in the sense of 'payment': • Please enclose this counterfoil with your remittance. Remission has a wider range of uses and meanings, such as 'reduction in the length of a prison sentence', 'abatement of the symptoms of a disease', 'discharge; release': • the remission of sins.

- Careful users maintain the distinction between the two words.

remit The noun remit is best avoided where task, responsibility, brief, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • The quality control function will also be part of your remit (Executive Post).

- As a synonym for the wordy expression terms of reference, however, denoting the scope of an investigation, remit is welcomed by many users: • Financial matters are not part of the inquiry's remit.

The verb remit is pronounced [ri'mit]. The noun may also be stressed on the second syllable, but its usual pronunciation is [re'mit].

See also STRESS.

remittance see REMISSION or REMITTANCE?

renge The traditional pronunciation of this word, which means 'not keep (a promise, agreement, etc.)' is [renj], but [ri'næg] is also frequently used and is acceptable.

Note the spelling of renege, particularly the -e ending. The spelling renegade is a less frequent variant.

The verb renge is followed by the preposition on: • They reneged on the deal.

rent see hire or rem?

repair see fix or repair?

repairable or repairable? Both these adjectives mean 'able to be repaired'; careful users apply repairable to material objects and repairable to abstract nouns: • The car is badly damaged but repairable. • His loss is scarcely repairable.

- The two adjectives relate to different senses of the verb repair: 'mend' or 'restore' (repairable) and 'remedy' or 'make good' (repairable).

Repairable, which is stressed on the first syllable
repel see repellant or repulsive?

repellent or repulsive? Repellent and repulsive mean 'causing disgust or aversion'. Repellent is the stronger of the two adjectives, both of which are ultimately derived from the Latin verb repellere, meaning 'repel': • His deformed body was a repellent sight. • The partially decomposed corpse was a repellent sight. • The principles of Communism are repellent to some; the doctrine of Nazism were repellent to many.

The adjective repellent is also used in combination to mean 'driving away' or 'resistant': • insect-repellent cream • water-repellent fabric. Repellent is a less frequent spelling of the noun and adjective repellent.

The verb repel is a weaker synonym of repulse. The use of the verb repel in the sense of 'disgust' or 'cause aversion' is disliked by some users, who restrict it to the sense of 'drive back' or 'rebuff': • The inhabitants repulsed the invading army. • He repulsed her offer of friendship. Repel may be used in any of these senses.

repent The verb repent may be followed by the preposition of: • He repented (of) his dissolute youth.

repercussions The word repercussions is best avoided where result, consequence, effect, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate: • the repercussions of a ban on smoking in restaurants.

The noun repercussion literally means 'reverberation' or 'rebound'; in figurative contexts it should be restricted to indirect or far-reaching effects: • the repercussions of a serious accident at one of Britain's nuclear power stations.

repertoire or repertory? The noun repertoire principally denotes the musical or dramatic works, poems, jokes, etc., that a person or group is able or prepared to perform: • That song is not in her repertoire.

The word repertory is also used in this sense but is more frequently applied to a company of actors that presents a repertory plays at the same theatre: • a repertory company • a repertory theatre • a cabaret performed in repertory.

repetitious or repetitive? The adjective repetitive means 'characterized by repetition'; repetitious means 'characterized by unnecessary or tedious repetition': • a repetitive rhythm • repetitive arguments.

• Repetitive, the more frequent of the two adjectives, is also sometimes used in the derogatory sense of repetitious, but careful users avoid this usage: • a lengthy repetitious [not repetitive] description of the ceremony.

Note the spellings of repetitious, repetitive, and the related noun repetition, particularly the second -e- which is sometimes wrongly replaced by -i-.

replace or substitute? The verb replace means 'take the place of'; the verb substitute means 'put in the place of': • I substituted his painting for her photograph. • Her photograph was replaced with his painting. • His painting was substituted for her photograph. • His painting replaced her photograph.

Substitute is always used with the preposition for; replace may be used with the preposition with or by (especially in passive sentences): • Her photograph was replaced by his painting.

All the examples above refer to the act of removing her photograph and putting his painting in its place. The two verbs are often confused in such contexts, substitute being used instead of replace, but careful users maintain the distinction between them.

replica Some people object to the frequent use of replica in place of copy, duplicate, reproduction, model, etc.: • He bought a plastic replica of the Eiffel Tower. • This article is a replica of yesterday's editorial. • Legislation to ban replica guns.

The noun replica principally denotes an exact copy of a work of art, especially one made by the original artist. The phrase exact replica is therefore tautologous.

reported speech Reported speech, also called indirect speech, differs from direct speech in a number of ways. In direct speech the actual words of the speaker are given, enclosed in QUOTATION MARKS in written or printed texts: • Mary said, 'I've lost my ring.' In reported speech quotation marks are not used for this purpose: • Mary said that she had lost her ring.

Note the differences between the two examples above. The subject pronoun I usually changes to he or she in reported speech; we often change to they. The subject pronoun you may change to I in
The verb resort means ‘turn to’: • I hope he will not resort to violence. The verb re-sort, with a hyphen, means ‘sort again’; • re-sort all the index cards.

Resort, both as a noun and as a verb, is pronounced with a z [ɹəʊrt]; re-sort is pronounced with an s [ɹeɹəʊrt].

Resort, resource see recourse, resort or resource?

Respectable, respectful or respectively?

The three adjectives should not be confused. Respectable means ‘worthy of respect’; respectful means ‘showing respect’; respectively means ‘separate; several’ (see respectively or respectively?): • In those days acting was not considered a respectable profession; • a respectful silence • Jane and Michael collected their respective children and went home.

Respectful and respectively The words respectful and respectfully should be used only where there would be a risk of ambiguity or confusion in their absence: • The workers explained their respective problems to the shop steward. • Toys and furniture are sold on the second and third floors respectively. Without respectively, the first example could imply that all the workers had the same problems; without respectfully, the second example might suggest that toys and furniture are sold on both floors.

• In other contexts the words are often unnecessary or inappropriate: • Paul and Sarah got into their respective cars and drove away. • Each book must be returned to its respective shelf. • She worked (respectively) in Paris, Vienna, and Rome.

Respite This word, meaning ‘relief, delay’: • no respite from the toil, is often mispronounced. The stress falls on the first syllable, unlike despite, which has the stress on the second syllable.

• The second syllable may be pronounced [ɹɛpɪt] or [ɹɛspɪt] although some users prefer the former pronunciation.

Restaurateur Note the spelling of this formal word for a person who runs a restaurant. There is no n as in restaurant.

• Restaurateur is pronounced [restəˈreɪtər].

Restive or restless? The adjective restive means ‘resisting control’; restless means ‘fidgety’ or ‘agitated’: • The teacher tried to discipline his restive pupils. • Some of the
congregation became restless during the long sermon. The use of restive in place of restless is disliked by careful users.

- The two adjectives are etymologically unrelated: restive, which originally meant 'refusing to move', is derived from the same Latin source as the noun rest (meaning 'remainder'); restless, the opposite of restful, is derived from the noun rest (meaning 'reposo'), which is of Germanic origin.

**restrain** see **CONSTRING** OR **RESTRING**?

**restrictive clause** A restrictive clause limits the meaning of another part of a sentence: • The pistols which are on the wall were carried by my great-grandfather at Waterloo. Here the restrictive clause which are on the wall makes it clear which particular pistols are being referred to, and also implies that there are some other pistols elsewhere in the room. Note the contrast with The pistols, which are on the wall, were carried by my great-grandfather at Waterloo, in which the non-restrictive clause which are on the wall, preceded and followed by commas, implies that these are the only pistols under consideration and conveys the incidental information that they are on the wall.

See also **COMMA 3: THAT OF WHICH?**

**resuscitate** This word, meaning 'revive': • All attempts to resuscitate him with the kiss of life failed, is often misspelt. Note particularly the -ce- in the middle of the word.

**retch** or **wretch**? Retch means 'heave prior to vomiting': • The gore made him retch. It should not be confused with wretch, which denotes a pitiful or wretched person: • The wretch had no shoes and rags for clothes.

**retreat** The noun retreat denotes an old tyre with a new outer surface; it is synonymous with **re-mold**. Many people object to the metaphorical application of the word retreat to people, such as politicians returning to parliament after a spell out of office or retired people returning to paid employment: • There will be a number of retreats in the new government.

**retro** The prefix retro-, meaning 'backwards', is increasingly used as an adjective in its own right, describing fashions, styles, ideas, etc., that have been revived from the past • the retro look/sound • His latest film is unashamedly retro. • Retro British nursery food is just so now (The Guardian).

**return** see **RE**.

**returner** A returner is a person who returns to work after an extended period of absence from paid employment, such as a woman who resumes her career after spending a number of years bringing up her children: • Few employers are actually offering women returners a new deal . . . but a wealth of information on the subject is available (The Guardian). • Current trends are centring on more widely appealing 'returner schemes' which offer career breaks of between two and five years (The Guardian).

**reveille** This word may be pronounced [ri'vei] or [ri'vel], the former being the more frequent pronunciation.

- Note also the spelling; the word is derived from the French reveiller 'awaken'.

**revenge or avenge**? Both these verbs refer to the act of repaying a wrong. The person who avenges is usually the offended or injured party; a person who avenges is usually a third party acting on behalf of another: • I will revenge myself on those who cruelly humiliated me. • He planned to avenge his brother's death by drowning the murderer's daughter. • He avenged his murdered brother.

- This distinction is not observed by all users in all contexts, however, and revenge is often interchangeable with avenge.

See also **REVENGE** OR **VENGEANCE**?

**revenge or vengeance**? Both these nouns may be used in the sense of 'retribution' or 'retributional': • The destruction of her parents' home was an act of vengeance. • Some users associate revenge with the subjective or personal act of revenging and vengeance with the objective or impersonal act of avenging (see **REVENGE** or **AVENGE**): • They humiliated me, but I will take my revenge. • He sought vengeance for the murder of his brother.

**reverend** or **reverent**? Reverend is a title used by members of the clergy: • Reverend Jones took the service. It is abbreviated to Rev. It should not be confused with reverent, an adjective meaning 'respectful': • He handled the relic with reverent awe.

**reversal or reversion**? Reversal is the act of reversing; reversion is the act of reverting: • the reversal of this trend • reversion to his former way of life. The two nouns should not be confused.
reversion see REVERSAL or REVERSION?

review or revue? These two spellings are sometimes confused. Review, as a noun, is a 'critical appraisal': • a review of her latest novel or a 'reassessment': • The minister ordered an urgent review of prison security. A revue is a light theatrical show consisting of sketches, songs, etc.: • the annual Christmas revue.

• Revue may also be spelled review, but this is best avoided in order to maintain the distinction between the two words.

rhetorical question A rhetorical question is one which is asked for effect, and to which no answer is expected: • What is the world coming to? • How can people behave like that? The question is sometimes asked so that it can be answered immediately by the speaker: • Why are we on strike? I will tell you why . . .

• A rhetorical question is sometimes just a rephrased statement, put in question form for greater emphasis: • Was there ever a more unfortunate person?

rheumatism This word for an illness that causes pain in the muscles or joints is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the first syllable rheum-.

rhinoceros The name of this animal is often misspelt. Note particularly the rh- and the c in the middle of the word.

rhododendron This word is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the rh- at the beginning and the dh- in the middle.

• The word rhododendron comes originally from the Greek rhodon (meaning 'rose') and dendron (meaning 'tree').

rhythm This word is frequently misspelt. Note particularly the first a and the y.

ribald This adjective, meaning 'coarse or crude': • ribald language, is often mispronounced. The pronunciation is [rɪbɔːld].

• The alternative [rɪbɔːld] is regarded as unacceptable by careful users.

ricochet This word, used to describe bullets, etc., that rebound, is usually pronounced [rɪkoʊˈʃeɪt] although [rɪkoʊʃet] is also acceptable. There are alternative present and past participles: ricocheting [rɪkoʊˈʃeɪtɪŋ] or ricocheting [rɪkoʊʃetɪŋ] and ricocheted [rɪkoʊˈʃeɪtɪd] or ricocheted [rɪkoʊʃetɪd].

right or rightly? Both these adverbs may be used in the sense of 'correctly' or 'properly'.

Right is generally placed after the verb, rightly before the verb: • Have I spelt your name right? • He rightly stopped at the zebra crossing. • You're not holding your fork rightly. • She rightly held her fork in her left hand.

• The phrase If I remember rightly is a notable exception to this rule.

Right has a number of other adverbial uses: • Turn right at the next junction. • They went right home. • We live right at the top of the hill. Rightly also means 'justly' or 'suitably': • She was rightly annoyed by their behaviour. • Am I rightly dressed for the trip? The two adverbs are not interchangeable in any of these senses.

In informal contexts right is sometimes used to mean 'very' and rightly to mean 'with certainty': • We're right pleased to see you. • He doesn't rightly know.

right or write? Right variously means 'correct', 'good', or 'of or relating to the side opposite left': • Everything is now right and proper. • He was in the right. • The car turned to the right. It should not be confused with the verb write: • She writes a thousand words a day.

• The word write generally appears combined with other words to describe someone who pursues a particular trade: • wheelwright • shipwright • millwright • playwright.

See also DRAMATIST or PLAYWRIGHT.

rigor see RIGOUR or RIGOR?

rigorous This word is sometimes misspelt. The u of rigor is dropped in front of the suffix -ous.

rigour or rigor? Rigour, meaning 'harsh conditions; severity': • the rigours of winter, should not be confused in British English with the medical rigor: • rigor mortis.

• Note, however, that in American English rigor is spelt rigor.

ring or wring? These two verbs are sometimes confused, being identical in pronunciation. Ring means 'make a resonant sound' or 'surround or mark with a ring': ring means 'twist' or 'squeeze': • to ring a bell • I asked her to ring any errors red ink. •
ringed

to wring one's hands; Shall I wring out the wet clothes?
• The past tense and past participle of wing is wrung, which should not be confused with rung (see RINGED, RANG or RUNG?)

ringed, rang or rung? Ringed is the past tense and past participle of the verb ring in the sense of 'surround or mark with a ring':
• He ringed all the words that had been misspelt. • The birds have been ringed for identification. Rang is the past tense and rung the past participle of the verb ring in the sense of 'sound (a bell)'. • She rang the bell. • The telephone has not rung.
• The substitution of rung for rang is now restricted to dialectal usage; it is considered incorrect in formal British English.

rip-off Derived from the slang verb rip off, meaning 'steal' or 'cheat', the noun rip-off is principally applied to overpriced goods or the practice of charging exorbitant prices: • This handbag is an absolute rip-off - it's not even made of real leather. • I had to pay £10 to get in - it's a rip-off!
• Extending this sense of 'exploitation', rip-off is also used to denote an inferior film, book, etc., that seeks to exploit the success of another by imitation.

The noun rip-off should not be used in formal contexts.

rise see arise or rise?; raise or rise?

road or street? Generally the noun road is used to denote a thoroughfare between towns or cities or in the suburbs of a town or city; a street is a thoroughfare in the town or city centre:
• a country road • a one-way street • the road to Brighton • the streets of London • a new housing estate on Park Road • their Oxford Street store. There are, however, numerous exceptions to this rule, especially in the naming of roads and streets.
• Through its association with inner-city areas the word street has acquired certain negative connotations, and it is rarely used in the names of thoroughfares on new estates. It is used in a number of words and expressions related to prostitution: • on the streets • streetwalker, and also in neutral idioms such as streets ahead, meaning 'much better': • She's streets ahead of her sister at maths, and (right) up one's street, meaning 'suited to one's interests or experience': • This project is right up my street.

See also STREET.

rob The verb rob, meaning 'steal money or property from' or 'take away an important quality from' is followed by the preposition of: • He robbed his employers of thousands of pounds. • The incident robbed him of his dignity.

See also BURGLAR, ROB or STEAL?

role Some people object to the frequent use of the noun role as a synonym for 'place', 'function', 'position', 'part', etc.: • the role of religion in modern society • a proven track record in a technical sales role • A new manager is now sought to play a key role in determining the company's future strategy. The noun role is principally used to denote the part played by an actor. In psychology and sociology it refers to the part played by an individual in a social situation: • role reversal • role-playing.
• The word is sometimes spelt with a circumflex accent over the o, as in the French word from which it is derived: • role, it should not be confused with the English noun roil, to which it is etymologically related.

Roma Roma is the approved modern replacement for the former term gipsy, which is felt by many people to have acquired negative connotations over the centuries. Note that Roma is used in both singular and plural contexts, though the correct singular form is Rom.

roofs or rooves? The plural of the word roof, 'covering of a building', is usually roofs, pronounced [roofs] or [roovez].
• The spelling of the plural rooves is less frequent.

root see rout or route?

rosin see resin or rosin?

roughage This word, meaning 'coarse food; dietary fibre', is sometimes misspelt. Note the -gh- in the middle of the word.

round see around or round?

rouse see arouse or route?

route or route? The noun rout means 'overwhelming defeat' or 'disorderly retreat'; the noun route means 'road' or 'course': • They put the enemy to rout. • The procession took a different route this summer.
• The risk of confusion is greater when the words are used as verbs, especially in the past tense: •
They routed the enemy. • The procession was routed along a different road. The e of route is sometimes retained in the spelling of the present participle.

The phrasal verb route out, meaning 'find by searching' or 'force out', is a variant of the verb root, meaning 'rummage', and is etymologically unrelated to the verb rout discussed above.

Rout is pronounced [rout], rhyming with out, in all its senses and uses. The pronunciation of route is identical with that of root in British English; in American English route may be pronounced [root] or [rout].

rowlock This word, for the device in a boat that holds an oar in place, is usually pronounced [roʊlok]. • In nontechnical contexts, rowlock is sometimes pronounced [rɔl̩k].

RSI The abbreviation RSI is short for repetitive strain injury; injury to muscles or tendons caused by repetitive action, such as using a computer keyboard: • Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) is an umbrella term for a series of musculo-skeletal complaints now affecting the newspaper industry – among others (The Guardian).

rubbish The use of the word rubbish as a verb, meaning 'criticize severely' or 'condemn as worthless', is disliked by many users and should be avoided in formal contexts: • The report rubbishes the new GCSE examinations.

rung see RINED, RANG or RUNG?

run-up Some people dislike the frequent use of the noun run-up, adopted from the field of athletics, to denote the period preceding an important event: • the last few days in the run-up to the general election • The run-up to the anniversary of soldiers being deployed on the streets of Northern Ireland (BBC TV).

rural or rustic? Both these adjectives relate to the countryside, country life, country people, farming, etc. Rural is used as a neutral opposite of urban; rustic has the connotations of simplicity, crudeness, quaintness, or lack of sophistication: • rural schools • a rural setting • rural areas • rustic food • a rustic cottage • rustic manners. Careful users maintain the distinction between the two words.

Russian or Soviet? The word Russian relates to the country of Russia, which formed the major part of the Soviet Union from 1922 to 1991, and its people: • the Russian composer Rimsky-Korsakov • a Russian manufacturing company. The word Soviet is used with reference to people and events of the years when the Soviet Union was in existence: • Soviet space missions • a Soviet politician.

The noun and adjective Russian, formerly loosely applied to all the constituent republics of the Soviet Union and their people, should not be used with reference to the people of Ukraine, Lithuania, etc., since their independence in 1991.
's or s'? Possessive nouns are usually formed by adding 's to singular nouns, an apostrophe to plural nouns that end in s, and 's to irregular plural nouns that do not end in s: • Jane's pen • the boy's father • the directors’ cars • women's clothes. 
* In the possessive form of a name or singular noun that ends in s, x, or z, the apostrophe may or may not be followed by s. The final s is most frequently omitted in names, especially names of three or more syllables that end in the sound [s]: • Euripides’ tragedies • Berioz’s operas. For words of one syllable 's is generally used: • St James’s Palace • the fox’s tail • Liz’s house • the boss’s secretary. The presence or absence of the final s in other possessives of this group depends on usage, convention, pronunciation, etc: • the princess’s tiara • Jesus’ apostles • the thimoceras (s) horn • Nostadamus’ (s) prophecies. 
* See also APOSTROPHE; CONTRACTIONS; ING FORMS; POSSESSIVES; SAEK.

sack or sack? These two spellings are sometimes confused. The noun sack is largely restricted to scientific contexts, where it denotes a bag-like part of an animal or plant: • a fluid-filled sac. A sack is a large bag used to hold coal, potatoes, etc. 
* In informal contexts sack is also a noun or verb referring to dismissal from employment: • They got the sack. • We sacked them.

The word sac, of French origin, occurs in the compound cul-de-sac, meaning ‘dead end’.

saccharin or saccharine? The sweet powder that is used as a sugar substitute is spelt saccharin, without a final -e; saccharine is an adjective meaning 'excessively sweet': • The drink is sweetened with saccharin. • a saccharine smile.
* The use of saccharine in place of saccharin is acknowledged by some dictionaries but is widely regarded as incorrect. Note also the -cc and -ar-of both words.
sack see SACK or SACK?
sacred This word, which means 'showing disrespect towards something holy', sometimes causes problems with spelling. Note the position of the first i and e, which are in the opposite order in the word religious.
sail or sale? Sail means 'expanse of canvas or cloth used to propel a vessel using wind-power': • The crew lowered the sail as the gale gathered strength. It should not be confused with sale, which denotes the selling of something: • a house sale.
sake The noun sake is usually preceded by a possessive adjective or noun: • for their sake • for Edward’s sake • for pity’s sake • for old times’ sake.
* If the preceding noun ends in the sound [s] the possessive form is not used, although an apostrophe may be added: • for goodness sake • for conscience’ sake.

Such expressions as for all our sakes and for both their sakes, using the plural form of sake, are disdained by some users but acceptable to most. They may be replaced by for the sake of us all, for the sake of both of them, etc.
salable see SALEABLE or SALABLE?
salary or wage? Both these nouns denote the money paid to employees at regular intervals in return for their services. A salary is usually paid monthly to professional people or nonmanual workers; a wage is usually paid weekly to manual workers or servants: • My salary barely covers our mortgage repayments and living expenses. • the minimum wage for factory workers.
* The noun wage is often used in the plural form wages: • a bricklayer’s wages) • He seems to spend most of his wages on cigarettes and alcohol. The noun wages is not used with a singular verb, except in the well-known biblical quotation the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).
sale see SAIL or SALE?
word are acceptable, but saleable is the more frequent in British English. See spelling 3.

salesman or saleswoman see non-sexist terms.

salivary This word has two possible pronunciations. The more traditional pronunciation has the stress on the first syllable [salivári]. The pronunciation [salivári], with the stress on the second syllable, is perfectly acceptable and is more frequently used.

salmonella This word is sometimes mispronounced. The correct pronunciation is [salmonéla].

Unlike the -er in salmon, the first -er in salmonella is clearly sounded. The word salmonella has in fact nothing to do with salmon; it is named after the American veterinary surgeon Daniel Eimer Salmon (1850-1914), who first identified this genus of bacteria.

salon or saloon? Saloon is the anglicized form of the French word salon. Both words entered the English language in the 18th century and have developed a number of individual meanings. Salon is most frequently found in the names of certain places of business, such as: beauty salon • hairdressing salon. A saloon is a large room in a public house or on a ship: We went into the saloon (bar); it also denotes a type of car: the most popular saloon (car).

A salon is also a room for receiving visitors in a large house or an assembly of important political or artistic guests: the literary salons of 17th-century Paris.

salubrious or salutary? Salubrious means ‘wholesome’ or ‘conducive to health’; salutary means ‘beneficial’, ‘causing improvement’, or ‘remedial’: a salubrious climate • a salutary warning. We decided to look for a more salubrious hotel. Spending a few days in prison can be a salutary experience for young offenders.

The adjective salutary was formerly synonymous with salubrious but is rarely used in this sense today. Both adjectives are ultimately derived from the Latin word salus, meaning ‘health’.

Note the spelling of salutary, which ends in -ary, not -ory.

same The use of same as a pronoun is best restricted to business or official contexts: I enclose my passport, as requested; please return same by registered post. This usage is widely regarded as commercialese. Another pronoun, such as it or them, can usually be substituted for same: He found an old blanket and used it [not same] to line the dog’s basket.

Nouns qualified by the adjective same are usually followed by as: He works for the same company as his brother-in-law. She sent me the same book as you gave her last Christmas. In the second example and similar sentences as is often omitted or replaced by that: the same suit that he wore for his wedding. This usage is disliked and avoided by a few users.

sanatorium A sanatorium is a medical establishment for the treatment and care of people, especially those suffering from long-term illnesses. Note the spelling of this word in British English, particularly the second a and the o. The spelling sanitarium is an American English variant.

The plural forms of both spellings may end in -ums or -ta.

sanction The noun sanction has two senses that appear to contradict each other. It may mean ‘official authorization or permission’: The project has been given the sanction of the board of directors. This use is largely restricted to formal contexts, and the noun is perhaps more frequently found in the plural form sanctions; referring to coercive measures taken against a state or institution: economic sanctions against Iraq • to impose political sanctions.

The verb sanction means ‘permit’ or ‘authorize’: The law does not sanction the use of violence in such cases. It should not be used in the sense of ‘impose sanctions’.

sank, sunk or sunken? The past tense of the verb sink is sank or sunk; sank being the more frequent. The usual form of its past participle is sunk, sunken being largely restricted to adjectival use: The dog sank its teeth into the man’s leg. One of the boats has sunk; We are diving for sunken treasure.

sarcasm, sarcastic see irony.

sat see sitting or sat.

sate, satiate or satisfy? The verb satisfy means ‘supply’ or ‘fulfil’: Her needs had been satisfied. This should satisfy their demands. The verbs site and satiate may mean ‘satisfy fully’, but are more frequently
used in the sense of 'supply or fulfil to excess': • to satiate a person's appetite • Television viewers are satiated with imported comedy shows. A person who is satisfied has had enough; a person who is satiated or satiated has usually had too much. Sate and sate are used in formal contexts and are largely synonymous, but sate is very rarely used as an active verb.

- The nouns satiate and sate are derived from sate. Sateion means 'the act of satiating' or 'the state of being satiated'; satiate is used only in the second of these senses. Both nouns are used only in formal contexts.

- Note the change in pronunciation of the first -t- in satiate [sætɪət] and satiate [sætət].

satire or satyr? Satire is the use of irony or parody to mock folly and evil in human behaviour, politics, religion, etc.; a satyr is a mythological creature in the form of a goatlike man, associated with lechery. The two nouns should not be confused in usage or pronunciation: satire rhymes with matter, whereas the second syllable of satyr rhymes with fire.

satisfy see sate, satiate or satisfy?

saturate The verb saturate is followed by the preposition with or in: • The rug was saturated with [or in] dirty water.

satisfy see satire or satyr?

savage The use of the word savage to describe a person from a technologically undeveloped culture is no longer considered acceptable and should be avoided: • The sailors found themselves surrounded by savages brandishing spears.

- Note that for similar reasons the term primitive may also cause offence.

savoir faire The French expression savoir faire is used in formal contexts to refer to an ability to act appropriately in different situations, especially to behave with self-confidence in social situations: • to display/ lack savoir faire.

- The phrase is sometimes hyphenated in English and is pronounced [saw-vwar fa], its literal French meaning is 'know how to do'.

saw, soar, or sore? The spellings of these three words are sometimes confused. Saw is the past tense of the verb see: • I saw her yesterday and also denotes a serrated blade used for cutting wood etc.: • The saw bit into the bark of the tree. Soar means 'fly' or 'rise rapidly': • The bird soared on the breeze.

- Inflation is soaring. Sore means 'painful' or 'hurting': • The child has a sore elbow. • My heart is sore.

says This word is sometimes mispronounced. The form of the verb say used in the present tense with he, she, or it is says, pronounced [sez].

scallop The standard pronunciation of this word, which means 'a shellfish with two flat fan-shaped shells', is [skələp]. An alternative which rhymes with gallop is often heard, but avoided by careful users.

scam The noun scam, originally a vogue word of American origin, means 'swindle', 'trick', 'racket', or 'hoax': • This [the Enterprise Allowance Scheme] was a government scam to get the unemployed off the register and pretend they were all setting up small businesses in the thriving enterprise culture instead (The Guardian).

scant or scanty? Both these adjectives mean 'limited', 'barely enough', or 'meagre'. Scant is more formal and less frequent than scanty, being chiefly used in front of certain abstract nouns: • He paid scant attention to my words. • She has scant regard for the law. Scanty is used before or after a wider range of nouns: • Their knowledge is rather scanty. • a scanty bikini • a scanty collection of books.

- Scant is also used with units of measurement to mean 'barely' or 'slightly less than': • a scant two ounces.

scarcely see hardly.

scared As an adjective scared is followed by the preposition of: • He's scared of spiders.

- As a past participle scared is followed by the preposition by: • We were scared by their treats.

scarfs or scarves? Either scarfs or scarves is acceptable as the plural of the noun scarf, denoting a piece of cloth worn around the neck or on the head.

scarify The verb scarify should not be used in place of scrape, to which it is unrelated in meaning and origin. Scarify tends to be used in formal contexts and means 'scratch or break up the surface of': • to scarify the skin before administering a vaccine • to scarify
the topsoil of a field. In figurative contexts it is used in the sense of 'wound with harsh criticism': • a scathing review.
• The traditional pronunciation of scarily [ski:rali], the pronunciation [ski:rali] being an accepted and frequent variant.

scary or scarey? • The use of the adjective scary in the extended sense of 'inconsistent', 'contradictory', 'unpredictable', 'capricious', etc., is disliked and avoided by most users.

scared (adj.) The pronunciation of this word is a favourite topic for debate; both [skərd] and [skəred] are equally acceptable.
• The parish of Scar in East Scotland, the original site of the stone on which Scottish kings were crowned, is pronounced [skəred].

scarf or scarff? All these adjectives mean 'of Scotland', but there are differences of usage and application between them.
• Scottish, the most frequent, is used in a wide range of contexts: • Scottish history • a Scottish piper • a Scottish name • Scottish dancing • a Scottish poet.

scenario The noun scenario is frequently used to denote a projected or imagined future state of affairs or sequence of events:
• a scenario in which the superpowers would have recourse to nuclear weapons. Many people object to the frequency of this usage, especially in contexts where plan, programme, scene, situation, etc., would be adequate or more appropriate. The cliché nightmare scenario and worst-case scenario, both of which mean 'the worst thing that could happen', are also best avoided whenever possible.
• The principal meaning of scenario is 'outline or synopsis of a play, film, opera, etc.'. The word is usually pronounced [skənəri]; the variant pronunciation [skənəri] is disliked by some users.

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sceptical The adjective sceptical is followed by the preposition about or of: • I remain sceptical about [or of] her motives.

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several or sevaral? This word, meaning 'plurality of fields', is [skərali], with a silent ch.

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schedule This word, meaning 'plan or timetable': • The train was behind schedule again, is usually pronounced [ˈʃedjuːl] in British English. The word may also be pronounced [ˈʃeɪdjuːl], particularly in American English.
• The verb schedule, 'to plan', should not be overused.

schism The traditional pronunciation of this word, meaning 'separation into opposed groups', is [ˈskɪzm], with a silent ch.

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schizophrenic The adjective schizophrenic relates to the mental disorder schizophrenia, which is characterized by hallucinations, delusions, social withdrawal, emotional instability, loss of contact with reality, etc.: • Another sufferer believes during a schizophrenic attack that he is in command of a spaceship, 2,000 years in the future (Reader's Digest).

scary or scarey? The pronunciation of this word is a favourite topic for debate; both [skərd] and [skəred] are equally acceptable.
• The parish of Scar in East Scotland, the original site of the stone on which Scottish kings were crowned, is pronounced [skəred].

Scott, Scots or Scottish? All these adjectives mean 'of Scotland', but there are differences of usage and application between them.
• Scottish, the most frequent, is used in a wide range of contexts: • Scottish history • a Scottish piper • a Scottish name • Scottish dancing • a Scottish poet.

scorpions The adjective scorpions was formerly used for such purposes but is now restricted to a number of fixed phrases, in the sense of 'produced in Scotland' or 'associated with Scotland': • Scotch whisky • Scotch broth • Scotch mist.

scottish (adj.) is usually applied to people: • the Scots Guards • a Scotsman • a Scotswoman. The last two examples may be replaced by the noun Scot, which means 'a native or inhabitant of Scotland': • She married a Scot. The collective name for the people of Scotland is the Scots or the Scottish. The noun Scots also denotes a variety of English spoken in Scotland.

In some contexts two of the adjectives are interchangeable: • a Scots/Scotch pine • a Scottish/Scotch terrier • a Scottish/Scots accent.

sculpt or sculpture? The verbs sculpt and sculpture are synonymous and virtually interchangeable in all contexts: • He sculpted/ sculpedured a copy of the Venus de Milo in marble. • She paints and sculpts/sculp used in her attic studio.

sculptor or sculptress? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.
sea or see? Sea means ‘ocean’ or ‘wide expanse of something’. • They set sail upon the sea. • A sea of eager faces. It should not be confused with the verb see, meaning ‘catch sight of’. • Did you see that? See is also occasionally used as a noun to refer to the office or jurisdiction of a bishop: • the see of Rome.

seamless This word, meaning ‘having no seam’ or ‘uninterrupted’, is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the -ear- in the middle of the word: • a seamless blouse • a seamless transition from one story to another.

The word seamless is an archaic word meaning ‘unseemly; shameful; unlovely’ (Oxford English Dictionary).

seasonal or seasonal? Seasonal means ‘of or occurring in a particular season’; seasonal means ‘suitable for the season’ or ‘opportune’: • seasonal vegetables • seasonal work • seasonal weather • seasonal advice. The two adjectives should not be confused.

seateurs This word, meaning ‘pruning shears’, is sometimes misspelt. Note the single -e- and the -eurs ending.

second or secondly? see FIRST or FIRSTLY?

second-guess The verb second-guess, of American origin, means ‘predict’, ‘anticipate’, or ‘evaluate with hindsight’. • On a scale of difficulty of one to 10, second-guessing the travel market this year is 12 (The Guardian).

Some people object to the use of this Americanism in British English.

secretary The word secretary is sometimes misspelt. Note the -ary ending, which is attached to the letters of the word secret.

The a of secretary is rarely sounded in the British English pronunciation [sekrətri]. Careful users always sound the first r, however, and object to the pronunciation [sekətri]. The usual American English pronunciation is [sekretərɪ].

see see SEA or SEE?

seed see CEDE or SEED?

seeing as or seeing that? The construction seeing as, meaning ’since’, is disliked by some people and should be used only in very informal contexts: • We will help you out seeing as you helped us. Seeing that is the more correct form of the conjunction: • We should go at once, seeing that it is already late.

seem When the verb seem is used in the negative, the word not (or other negative element) may be placed before or after the verb: • She didn’t seem to understand. • She seemed not to understand. • The weather doesn’t seem likely to improve. • The weather seems unlikely to improve. The use of didn’t seem, doesn’t seem, etc., is best avoided in formal contexts.

Similalry, the phrases cannot seem, can’t seem, couldn’t seem, etc., should be restricted to informal speech: • He couldn’t seem to hear us. • I cannot seem to find the key. In formal writing such phrases may be replaced by seem unable or simply cannot: • He seemed unable to hear us. • I cannot find the key.

seemless see SEAMLESS.

seize This word, meaning ‘take eagerly or by force’: • He seized the money and ran, is sometimes misspelt. Note the order of the vowels -ei- which does not correspond to the usual ‘i’ before ‘e’ rule.

See also SPELLING S.

self The use of the word self as a pronoun is disliked and avoided by many users, even in informal contexts: • tickets for husband and self.

The noun self and its plural form selves are acceptable to all users: • his usual self • their true selves.

The suffixes -self and -selves are used to form the reflexive pronouns myself, yourself, ourselves, themselves, etc.: • She killed herself while under the influence of drugs. Some people object to the use of these pronouns for emphasis: • The house itself will be demolished next week. • He has not driven the car himself.

See also MYSELF.

The prefix self- is always attached with a hyphen: • self-catering • self-confident • self-propelled • self-sufficient.

See also HYPHEN 1.

Some people object to the increasing use of the prefix self- to coin new verbs: • self-pick strawberries • We teach them to be aware, to self-market, to look at the future, perhaps in a slightly different way (The Guardian). • Farmers may one day be able to graze ’self-dipping’ sheep which do not need to be dunked in chemicals to deter attacks by pests and parasites (Daily Telegraph). Such verbs can often be replaced by a more
acceptable phrase using a reflexive pronoun, such as market oneself in place of self-market.

**self-starter** The frequent use of the noun **self-starter**, especially in job advertisements, to denote a person with initiative who can work without supervision, is disliked by many users: • We need an ambitious **self-starter** with experience in production control and man-management.

**sell-by date** This phrase literally means 'the date by which perishable goods should be sold', but it is increasingly used in figurative contexts, meaning 'no longer useful or effective; out-of-date': • The government is past its **sell-by date**. • Ideas that have passed their **sell-by date**. The phrase should not be overused in this sense.

• Other phrases adopted from commercial usage include best-before date and shelf-life; • the best-before date for new entrants to the profession • She was forced to admit that she was approaching the end of her shelf-life as a marriage prospect.

**semantics, semiotics or semiology?**
Semiotics (or semiology) is the study of the properties of sign systems, especially as used in human communication. Semantics, one part of semiotics, is the study of the meaning of linguistic signs. For example, discussion of the meaning of the words book, the moon, or yellow belongs to semantics, whereas the wider cultural aspects of raising one's eyebrows when people greet each other at a distance belongs to semiotics.

**semi**- see demi-, hemic- or semi-?

**semicolons** Unlike many of the other punctuation marks, there is no occasion when the semicolon cannot be replaced by another form of punctuation or sentence construction and its use appears to be gradually declining. It is mainly used between clauses that are linked by sense but are not joined by a conjunction, and that could each stand as a separate sentence: • I am very tired; I am also hungry. • The night was dark; the rain fell in torrents.

• It is frequently used before such phrases as however, none the less, and nevertheless: • This precaution is recommended; however, it is not compulsory.

The semicolon can sometimes be replaced by a comma, but in sentences where clauses already contain commas, the semicolon is often used to separate the clauses: • Eliot, though born in America, was a British subject; he lived, worked, and died in England. The semicolon can also be used in order to establish subsets in a long list or series separated by commas: • Applicant's must have a good honours degree, preferably in English, a lively writing style, a knowledge of magazine publishing, and proven editorial experience; an ability to work under pressure, to cooperate with colleagues, and to work flexible hours.

**semiotics, semiology** see **semantics**, **semiotics** or **semiology**?

**senior citizen or old age pensioner?** Both these expressions are used with reference to people who are over the age of retirement. The expression senior citizen is considered a euphemism by most: • There are courses for senior citizens at the university. • Senior citizens are entitled to reduced bus and train fares. The term old age pensioner specifically denotes a person who receives a state retirement pension.

• Old age pensioner, often shortened to pensioner or abbreviated to OAP, may have connotations of dependence: • Helping old age pensioners in the community • pensioners who are unable to pay their fuel bills.

**sensible or sensitive?** The most frequent meaning of sensible is 'having or showing common sense; not foolish; practical': • a sensible child • sensible advice • the sensible thing to do • sensible shoes. Sensitive means 'easily hurt or irritated', 'having awareness', 'delicate', or 'reacting to very small differences': • sensitive skin • He's very sensitive about his large nose. • We are sensitive to your problems. • a sensitive issue • a sensitive instrument.

• Note that, by extension, sensibility denotes a person's emotional or aesthetic awareness, while sensitivity refers more generally to a person's emotional or physical responses: • Her association with famous painters of the day is a testament to her artistic sensibility. • The school must show sensitivity to the parents' wishes.

**sensitive** The adjective **sensitive** is followed by the preposition to in the sense 'affected by': • He is too sensitive to criticism, and by about in the sense 'self-conscious': • She is very sensitive about her large nose.

**sensual** or **sensuous?** Both these adjectives relate to the gratification of the senses.
Something that is sensual appeals to the body, arousing or satisfying physical appetites or sexual desire; something that is sensual appeals to the senses, sometimes especially the mind, being aesthetically pleasing or spiritually uplifting. • To indulge in the sensual pleasures of eating and drinking. • The sensual movements of the strip-tease artist. • The sensual movements of the ballerina. • To appreciate the sensual music of Elgar's cello concerto.

- The use of the adjective sensual sometimes implies disapproval, whereas sensuous is generally used in a favourable manner.

Sensuous was coined originally by the English poet John Milton in the mid-17th century.

**sentence adverb** A sentence adverb is a word that qualifies an entire sentence: • Mutilarily the campaign was a great success. It should be noted that sentence adverbs that relate more to the speaker's attitude than to the content of the sentence itself may incur criticism: • Personally I think it's a mistake. • Thankfully no one was hurt. • Hopefully everything will go well.

**sentences** A sentence can be defined as 'a grammatically complete unit consisting of one or more words, which starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop, question mark, or exclamation mark'.

- The old rule that 'all sentences must contain a verb' holds good for most kinds of writing but it is a rule that is often legitimately broken, for example: • Whatever for? • For heaven's sake! • Yes, of course. Verbose sentences are often used for stylistic effect, particularly in order to emphasize or qualify a previous statement: • It was an illusion, he told himself. A trick of the light. • He's as rich as Croesus. Possibly richer.

Sentence structure and word order in English are partly a matter of rules and partly a matter of style. The normal word order is subject-verb-object; for example: • The dog bit the postman cannot be changed to The postman bit the dog without changing the sense of the sentence. However, one can choose one's word order in sentences like: • After lunch we could go for a walk. • We could go for a walk after lunch. • Even more delicious is her chocolate mouse. • Her chocolate mouse is even more delicious.

See also inversion.

**sentiment** or **sentimentality**? A sentiment is a feeling, emotion, attitude, or opinion: • Anti-communist sentiment. • These are my sentiments on the matter. Sentimentality is the state of being sentimental, with particular reference to excessive indulgence of the emotions: • The sentimentality of the film. • She kept her handkerchief under her pillow for reasons of sentimentality.

- Sentiment may also refer to indulgence of the emotions, but it is more neutral than sentimentality: • He seems to be totally lacking in sentiment.

**separate** This word is often misspelt. Note the vowels; the most frequent error is to replace the first -a- with -e-. It may help to associate the central syllable -par- with the central letters of the word apart.

- The verb separate is followed by the preposition from: • Keep raw meat separate from cooked meat.

**septic** see septic or septic

**sequence of tenses** When you change a verb from the present tense to the past tense, other verbs in the sentence may change too, according to a fixed pattern. This is known as the sequence of tenses: • He said, 'I know it is too late.' — He said that he knew it was too late. • She said, 'I am glad I sold my house.' — She said that she was glad she had sold her house.

See also tense.

**serf or surf?** These two words are occasionally confused, as they are pronounced in the same way. Serfs were agricultural labourers in feudal times, who had to work on their master's land. Surf is the breaking swell of the sea. As a verb surf means 'ride the surf' or in the informal expression surf the net, to look generally on the Internet for any information that interests one.

**sergeant** The spelling of sergeant is often a source of error. A sergeant is a middle-ranking noncommissioned officer in an army, etc., or an officer in a police force. A sergeant-major is a noncommissioned officer of the highest rank. A sergeant-at-arms is an officer in a parliament; a sergeant-at-law a former rank of barrister.

**serial** see cereal or serial

**series** The word series can be treated as either a singular or a plural noun, depending upon whether one or more series is being discussed: • A series of programmes has
been agreed. • Several series of programmes have been agreed.

seriously The adverb seriously is best avoided where very or extremely would be adequate or more appropriate: • They seemed to be having a very [not seriously] good time. • Her parents are extremely [not seriously] rich.

• The adjective serious is also overused in the sense of 'great', especially in the phrase serious money, meaning 'a large amount of money'.

serve The verb serve is followed by the preposition as or for: • The sofa serves as [or for] a spare bed.

service The verb service is best avoided where serve would be adequate or more appropriate: • Labour MPs have accused Thames Water officials of spending too much time on privatisation issues rather than servicing customers (Daily Telegraph). • A national organisation has been formed to service the local groups.

• The principal meanings of the verb service are 'overhaul': • The mechanic serviced the car, and 'pay interest on a debt'.

serviceable This word, meaning 'ready to be used; durable': • The television had been repaired and was now serviceable, is sometimes misspelt. The $e$ is retained before the suffix -able in order to retain the soft $e$ sound.

See also SPELLING 3.

serviceman or servicewoman: see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

session see CESSION or SESSION?

sewed or sewn? Either word may be used as the past participle of the verb sew: • I have sewn a patch over the hole. Sewn is often preferred to sewed, especially when the participle is used as an adjective: • a neatly sewn hem.

• The past tense of sew is always sewed: • She sewed the lace along the edge.

The verb sew and its derivatives should not be confused with sow (see SOWED or SOWN).

sexism The use of sexist language can often be avoided by the substitution of neutral synonyms or simple paraphrases, without recourse to clumsy or controversial neologisms. Those opponents of sexism who coin such expressions as the artist's mistress-piece and to person the telephones do little to further their cause.

See also POLITICAL CORRECTNESS.

• The most frequent examples of sexism include the use of the noun man in place of person; lady or girl in place of woman; he, him, and his as pronouns of common gender; and the titles Miss and Miss See HE or SHE; MAN; MS, MRS or MISS; WOMAN.

• The problems of sexism arising from occupational titles fall into three categories. The words engineer and nurse, for example, are neutral gender but are traditionally associated with men and women respectively. For this reason the terms female engineer, male nurse, etc., are sometimes used to avoid confusion. This is often quite unnecessary: • Dr Tony Butcher, 40, a former male nurse, has been appointed Britain's first Professor of Community Nursing at Manchester University (Daily Telegraph).

The ban on sexual discrimination in job advertisements has encouraged the substitution of neutral synonyms for occupational titles that specify sex: foreman and charwoman, for example, may be replaced by supervisor and cleaner; fireman and cameraman by firefighter and camera-operator; policeman and policewoman by police officer; salesman and saleswoman by sales representative or shop assistant.

See also NON-SEXIST TERMS; PERSON.

The use of feminine suffixes is also disliked by some users: • The fete was opened by the comédienne Victoria Wood. • Her sister is an usherette at the local cinema. • He married a successful authoress.

See also -ESS.

sexy Sexy, an informal adjective meaning 'arousing sexual interest' or 'sexually aroused', has increasingly become used as a synonym for 'attractive', 'enjoyable', 'exciting', or 'fashionable' in contexts that are completely devoid of sexual connotations: • 'Crime,' according to an independent television producer recently, 'is very sexy this year.' (The Guardian). • Boots wanted a presence in some of the sexier parts of the retailing business (The Guardian).

Shakespearean or Shakespearian? This word, meaning 'of or having the characteristics of Shakespeare': • a Shakespearean sonnet, may end with -an or with -an.

shall or will? The traditional distinction between shall and will is that shall is used in
the first person and will in the second and third persons as the future tense of the verb to be and that will is used in the first person and shall in the second and third persons to express determination, compulsion, intention, willingness, commands, promises, etc.:  
• I shall wash the dishes later.  • He will come back tomorrow.  • We will not obey you.  • They shall apologize immediately.

• In informal contexts the problem rarely arises, the contraction ’ll being used to represent both shall and will in all persons.

Outside England, especially in American, Scottish, and Irish English, the distinction between shall and will is more simply defined, shall being used in all persons to express determination, compulsion, etc., and will as the future tense of the verb to be, with an increasing tendency to use will in all senses. Modern usage in England is following this trend, although shall is retained in official contexts:

• Passengers shall remain seated until the vehicle is stationary.

The use of shall and will in questions is a more complex issue.  • Shall I stay? means ‘Do you want me to stay?’  • Shall we go? is a suggestion or proposition.  • Will I be won? means ‘Are we going to win?’  • Shall you pay the bill? means ‘Are you going to pay the bill?’  • Will you pay the bill? is a request.

shaved or shaven? Shaved is the past tense of the verb shave and the usual form of the past participle:  • He (has) shaved off his beard.  Shaven, a variant form of the past participle, is largely restricted to adjectival use:  • the shaved heads of the monks  • a clean-shaven young man.

She see HE or SHE; FEMALE or FEMININE? 

shear or shear? Shear means ‘cut or break off’ or ‘remove or deprive’:  • The mast had sheared off halfway up.  • Millions have been sheared off the budget. It should not be confused with shear, which means ‘utter’ or ‘vertical’:  • shear cheek  • a sheer drop.

sheared or shorn? Sheared is the past tense of the verb shear; shorn is the usual form of its past participle:  • They sheared the sheep.  • They have shorn the sheep.  • You will be shorn of your power.

• The past participle sheared is used in the technical sense of ‘deformed’,‘distorted’, ‘fractured’, or ‘broken’:  • The head of the screw has sheared off.

Shorn is also used as an adjective:  • a shorn lamb  • his shorn hair.

sheer see SHEAR or SHEER?

sheikh The preferred pronunciation of this word, which means ‘an Arab chief or ruler’, is [shayk]. The alternative pronunciation [sheik] is not generally accepted.

• Note the spelling of this word: the spelling sheik is an accepted variant.

shelf-life see SELL-BY DATE.

sherriff This word is often misspelt. Note the single -r- in the middle of the word and the -ff ending.

shibboleth The noun shibboleth is frequently used to denote a catchword, slogan, maxim, cliché, etc., especially one that is old-fashioned or obsolete:  • We were unimpressed by his speech, in which he did little more than repeat the old shibboleths of the party.

• Shibboleth traditionally refers to a custom or practice that serves to distinguish the members of one party, sect, race, etc., from those of another.

In the Old Testament (Judges 12:6) the word is used as a test to distinguish the Ephraimites, who could not pronounce the sound [sh], from the Gileadites.

shined or shone? Shone is the past tense and past participle for most senses of the verb shine; shined is restricted to the meaning ‘polished’:  • The sun (has) shone all day.  • He shone his torch on the statue.  • They (have) shined our shoes.

ship see BOAT or SHIP?

shone see SHINED or SHONE?

shoot see CHUTE or SHOOT?

shorn see SHEARED or SHORN?

should or would? In reported speech, conditional sentences, and other indirect constructions, the use of should and would follows the pattern of shall and will (as the future tense of the verb to be); would is always used in the second and third persons and often replaces should in the first person:

• We said we should / would stay until Saturday.  • She thought you would fail.  • If you were in trouble I should / would help you.  • He would open the door if he had the key. Would is also the correct choice when asking a question:  • Would you like to see the rest of the house?

See also SHALL or WILL?
A similar convention applies to the use of *should* and *would* in polite or formal constructions: • We *should* *would* like to buy a pair of sandals. • She *would* be pleased to oblige. • They *would* prefer to play outside.

In informal contexts, the distinction between *should* and *would* does not arise, the contraction *'d* being used to represent both *should* and *would* in all persons.

In the sense of 'ought to' *should* is used in all persons: • We *should* visit her more often. • You *should* be able to see it from here. There is sometimes a risk of ambiguity in the first person: • I *thought I should* accept their offer may be a paraphrase of 'I thought I ought to . . .' or the past tense of 'I think I shall . . .'

In the sense of 'used to' *would* is used in all persons: • When we were on holiday we *would* sometimes spend all day on the beach. • Before his retirement he *would* always get up at seven o'clock.

On the use of *should* or *would* of for *should* or *would* have see **OF**.

Se also **RATHER; SUBJUNCTIVE**.

*Shrank, shrank or shrunken?* Shrank is the past tense of the verb *shrink* and shrank the usual form of its past participle, the variant *shrunken* being more frequently used as an adjective: • He shrank from telling her the truth. • My pullover has shrank. • A shrunken old woman stood in the doorway.

• The use of *shrink* in place of *shrank* is also acknowledged by some authorities.

**Siamese twins** see **CONJOINED**.

*Sibling* The noun *sibling*, which denotes a brother or sister, is a useful word that is unfortunately disliked by many users and largely restricted to formal contexts and sociological jargon: • the two* 's relationship *with their* siblings: • sibling rivalry.

• The use of *sibling* and *siblings* to simplify such sentences as: • He *would* like to have a sibling [rather than a brother or sister] to play with and: • All of his siblings [rather than brothers and sisters] have left home has yet to gain general acceptance.

*Sic* The Latin word *sic*, meaning 'so' or 'thus', is used in printed or written text (often in a quotation) to indicate that an unlikely, unexpected, questionable, or misspelt word or phrase has in fact been accurately transcribed: • He *spoke* of a need for more thorough analysis [sic] of the results.

• *Sc* is enclosed in square brackets and inserted immediately after the word or phrase it refers to. The use of italics is optional.

**Sick or ill?** In British English to feel *sick* is to feel nauseated or queasy, to feel *ill* is to feel unwell: • She was *sick* yesterday usually means 'she vomited yesterday': • She was *ill* yesterday means 'she was not well yesterday'.

• The adjective *ill* is not usually used in this sense before a noun, sick being preferred: • a sick (not ill) man. (ill may, however, precede a noun in the sense of 'bad': • ill fortune • ill treatment • ill health.) Sick is also used with reference to absence from work because of illness: • to go sick • off sick • sick pay • sick leave.

In American English *sick* and *ill* are interchangeable in most contexts, *ill* being the more formal of the two adjectives.

**Sideline** Some people dislike the increasing use of the verb *sideline*, meaning 'prevent from taking part' or 'put out of action': • This country must not be *sidelined* at the United Nations. • The old guard has been sidelined by the new administration.

• Of sporting origin, the verb *sideline* has been used in American English since the 1940s, usually with reference to illness or injury that puts a player out of action.

*Siege* This word, meaning 'the surrounding of a fortified place to force a surrender', is sometimes misspelt. Note the order of the vowels -*er-, which conforms to the normal *er* before *e* rule.

Se also **SPELLING S**.

**Sight or site?** see **SITE, SIGHT OR SITE?**

**Significant** The adjective *significant* means 'having meaning': • a significant detail • a significant gesture.

• Its frequent use as a synonym for 'important', 'large', 'serious', etc., is disliked by some users: • a significant writer • a significant increase • a significant problem.

**Silhouette** This word, meaning 'outline; shadow', is sometimes misspelt, the most frequent error being the omission of the silent *-h-. Note also the -*ette* ending.

• The word derives from the name of the French politician Étienne de Silhouette (1709–67), perhaps because of his small-minded economies.
silicon or silicone? *Silicon* is an element that occurs in sand and is used in alloys, glass manufacture, and the electronics industry; • *silicon chip*. *Silicone* is a compound that contains silicon and is used in lubricants, polishes, and cosmetic surgery; • *silicone rubber.*

* The two words should not be confused. The final syllable of *silicon* is unstressed; the final syllable of silicone rhymes with bone.

**similar** Note the spelling of this adjective, particularly the single *-m* - and *-l* - and the *-ar* ending.

* The adjective similar is followed by the preposition to: • Their car is similar to ours. The alternative similar is as incorrect.

**similes** A *simile* is a figure of speech which, like a metaphor, suggests a comparison or analogy, but a simile expresses the comparison explicitly and is usually introduced by like or as: • teeth like pearls • as wide as the ocean. (In the second example the first as, before wide, is optional.)

* Similes are used in many well-known idioms: • good as gold • dry as dust • bold as brass, and many similes are so overworked as to have become clichés: • to run like the wind • a voice like thunder • eyes like stars.

Similes can, however, be used to good effect, particularly in humorous or ironical prose: • Jeeves coughed one soft, lovey, gentle cough like a sheep with a blade of grass stuck in its throat (P.G. Wodehouse, *The Inimitable Jeeves*). • A laugh swept through the conference hall as a drip of water might sweep through the Kalahari (The Times). They are more often used seriously in poetry:

* *Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,*  
  *Stains the white radiance of Eternity.*  
  (Shelley, *Adonais*)

**SIMILES**

as **bald** as a coot  
as **black** as coal/soot  
as **blind** as a bat  
as **bold** as brass  
as **bright** as a button  
as **brown** as a berry  
as **busy** as a bee  
as **clean** as a new pin/a whistle  
as **clear** as a bell/crystal  
as **cold** as ice  
as **common** as muck  
as **cool** as a cucumber

as **dead** as a doormat/the doodo  
as **deaf** as a post  
as **drunk** as a lord  
as **dry** as a bone/dust  
as **dull** as dishwater  
as **easy** as A.B.C.  
as **fat** as a pig  
as **fit** as a fiddle/a flea  
as **flat** as a pancake  
as **free** as a bird/fair  
as **fresh** as a daisy  
as **gentle** as a lamb  
as **good** at golf/hew  
as **green** as grass  
as **guilty** as sin  
as **happy** as a sandboy/Larry  
as **hard** as nails/iron  
as **heavy** as lead  
as **helpless** as a newborn babe  
as **honest** as the day is long  
as **hungry** as a horse  
as **keen** as mustard  
as **large** as life  
as **light** as a feather  
as **like** as two peas in a pod  
as **mad** as a hatter/a March hare  
as **nutty** as a fruitcake  
as **obstinate** as a mule  
as **old** as the hills  
as **patient** as Job  
as **plain** as a pikestaff  
as **playful** as a kitten  
as **pleased** as Punch  
as **poor** as a churchmouse  
as **proud** as a peacock  
as **pure** as the driven snow  
as **quick** as lightning  
as **quiet** as a mouse  
as **regular** as clockwork  
as **right** as rain  
as **round** as a barrel  
as **safe** as houses  
as **sharp** as a needle/a razor  
as **stark** as a dogle parrot  
as **silent** as the grave  
as **slippery** as an eel  
as **slow** as a snail  
as **sly** as a fox  
as **snug** as a bug in a rug  
as **sober** as a judge  
as **soft** as butter  
as **sound** as a bell  
as **steady** as a rock  
as **stiff** as a poker  
as **straight** as a die/an arrow
as strong as an ox/a horse
as sure as eggs is eggs
as sweet as a nut/honey
as thick as thieves/two short planks
as thin as a rake
as tough as old boots
as ugly as sin
as weak as water
as white as a sheet/a ghost/now
as wise as an owl/Solomon

simplistic The adjective simplistic means ‘oversimplified’ or ‘naive’; it should not be used in place of simple: • a simplistic explanation of the theory of relativity • a simple [not simplistic] explanation for her behaviour.
• Simplistic is generally used in a derogatory manner: • His simplistic solution to the problem was rejected without further discussion.

simulate or stimulate? These two verbs are sometimes confused. Simulate means ‘eign’, ‘imitate’, or ‘reproduce for the purpose of study, training, experiment, etc.’: • to simulate indifference • simulated leather • The process is simulated in the laboratory. Stimulate means ‘arouse’ or ‘excite’: • He stimulated his pupils’ interest. • a stimulating experience.

See also DISSEMBLE, DISSIMULATE or SIMULATE?

simultaneity The traditional pronunciation of this noun, derived from SIMULTA-
EOUS, is [simulˈteɪniəs], although [simuˈlæniəs] is also heard. The American English pronunciation is [sim-].

simultaneous This word, meaning ‘happen at the same time’, may cause problems with pronunciation. The usual pronunciation is [siməˈliːnəs]. The American English pronunciation is [sim-].

since see AGO or SINCE?; BECAUSE, AS, FOR or SINCE?

sincerely The adverb sincerely is sometimes misspelt. Note the -ere- in the middle, and the -ly (not -ley) ending.

sinister The noun sinister, meaning ‘a job or position in which payment is received for little or no work’, is often mispronounced. The correct pronunciation of this three syllable word is [ˈsɪnikər]; the -i- is long, as in wine, and the first -e- is not silent.

sine qua non The expression sine qua non, which is largely restricted to formal contexts, denotes an essential or indispensable condition or requirement: • Mutual trust is a sine qua non of a successful marriage.
• Of Latin origin, the phrase literally means ‘without which not’.

The word sine may be pronounced [sɪn], [sɪn], or [sɪn]; qua may be pronounced [kwɔɪ] or [kwɒɪ]; non may rhyme with gone or bone.

singing or singing? Singing is the present participle of the verb sing, meaning ‘burn slightly’: • It is difficult to iron this blouse without singing the lace. The -e of sing is retained in singing to keep the -g-soft and to distinguish it from singing, the present participle of the verb sing: • The birds were singing in the trees.

• Singing is pronounced [ˈsɪŋɪŋ]; singing is pronounced[sɪŋɪŋ]. Careful speakers do not insert the hard g sound, as in single, into singing, singer, etc.

singular or plural? As a general rule a singular verb is used with a singular subject and a plural verb is used with a plural subject. Problems arise when the subject is a noun or phrase that can be singular or plural and when a singular subject is separated from the verb by a number of plural nouns (or vice versa): • A list the names and addresses of new members is [not are] available on request.
• Such nouns as audience, government, jury, committee, family, crowd, herd, etc., and other collective nouns followed by of (a bunch of flowers, a flock of geese, a gang of thieves, etc.), are used with a singular verb if the people or items in question are considered as a group and with a plural verb if they are considered as individuals.

See also COLLECTIVE NOUNS; COMMITTEE; GOVERNMENT; ICS; KIND OF; MAJORITY and MINORITY; NUMBER.

Any corresponding pronouns or possessive adjectives should agree with the chosen verb: • The audience were asked to remain in their [not its] seats. • The jury has to consider all the evidence before it [not they] can reach a verdict. American English treats groups as singular more than British English does: • Harvard plays Yale, but: Oxford play Cambridge.

Measurements, sums of money, percentages, etc., are used with a singular verb if they are considered as a single entity: • Four metres is all we need. • Ten pounds is not enough. • Fifteen per cent is a generous increase.
Two or more nouns joined with and are used with a plural verb unless they represent a single concept: • His sister and her friend were killed in the accident. • Gin and tonic is a popular drink. However, nouns and phrases joined to the principal subject with as well as, together with, with, plus, etc., are regarded as parenthetical; the verb agrees with the principal subject alone: • A valuable painting, as well as her engravings, was destroyed in the fire. • Her engravings, together with a valuable painting, were destroyed in the fire.

See also ANY; EITHER; FOOT or FEET; MORE; NEITHER; NONE; ONE; OR; PLUS; THERE IS or THERE ARE?; TOGETHER WITH.

sink or sync? Sink is a verb meaning 'go down' or 'reduce' or a noun meaning 'basin for washing': • at the sun sinks in the west • Hopes were sinking fast. • the kitchen sink. It should not be confused with sync, which is an abbreviated form of synchronisation: • The two systems run in sync.

siphon or syphon? This word, meaning '(draw off liquid by means of a) tube using atmospheric pressure', can be spelt with an i or a y.

* Some users prefer the i spelling, since this reflects the original Greek σφην.

Sir Sir is a polite term of address for a man: • Thank you very much, sir. The word is usually written with a lower-case s- in such contexts, but as an impersonal salutation in LETTER WRITING it is always written with a capital S-: • Dear Sir.

* Sir, with a capital S-, is also the title of knights and baronets: • Sir Lancelot • Sir Humphrey Appleby. Note that it is correct to use Sir with a person's first name alone but not with his surname alone: • Sir Humphrey [not Sir Appleby].

sitting or sat? The substitution of sat, the past participle of the verb sit, for the present participle sitting is found in some dialects of English: • They were sitting in some dialects sat in the garden.

* Sat is correctly used in the passive form of the transitive verb sit: • We were sat at this table by the head waiter.

site or cite? See CITE, SITE or SIGHT?

sitting room see LOUNGE.

situation In the sense of 'state of affairs' the noun situation often serves a useful purpose, but it should not be used to excess: • We discussed our financial situation with the bank manager. • They are trying to improve the unemployment situation.

* in some contexts situation is quite superfluous; • a crisis situation is a crisis; • an interview situation is an interview.

See also ONGOING.

sixth This word may be pronounced [sixth] or [six], although some people dislike the omission of the second s sound.

sizeable or sizable? Both spellings of this word are acceptable. See SPELLING 3.

skilful The adjective skilful, meaning 'possessing skill', is sometimes misspelt. The final l of skill is dropped in British English before the suffix ful. In American English, the -l is retained: skilful.

skill The noun skill is followed by the preposition at or in: • The job requires considerable skill at or in dealing with difficult people.

slander see LIBEL or SLANDER?

slang Slang is unauthorized language, often but not necessarily coarse, which stands in the linguistic hierarchy between general informal speech and the specific vocabularies of professional and occupational jargon. Innovative and dramatic, slang is the most ephemeral of language, continually coining new terms and discarding old ones, which are either abandoned to obscurity or transferred into the respectable boundaries of the standard language.

* Slang includes shortening of words: • biz (business) • vibes (vibrations); onomatopoetic words: • zap; rhyming slang or abbreviations of it: • skin and blisters (sister) • plates (feet, from plates of meat); terms from the criminal and drug subcultures: • grass (a police informer, or alternatively marijuana) • pomadour (time spent in prison) • speed (an amphetamine drug).

Many slang terms are existing words which are given new meanings. Examples include: • cool (impressive) and • wicked (great).

A sparing use of slang can be effective, except when the context is too formal for it to be appropriate. However, slang often becomes obsolete or old-fashioned very quickly and the use of out-of-date or overworked slang can make speech or writing seem dated and tedious.

See also DRUGS SLANG.
slash The symbol /, called a slash, is widely used in computing, both in command lines for computer software and in e-mail addresses. Note that a forward slash (/) is the form used in Internet addresses, while a backward slash (\) is used to identify computer files, etc.

See also SOUDUS.

sled, sledge or sleigh? All these nouns denote vehicles that are used on snow for transport or recreation.

• Sledge, the most frequent in British English, is often used in American English. Sleight usually refers to a large sledge that is pulled by animals; the smaller sledge that is used for sliding downhill is also known as a toboggan • a picture of Father Christmas on his sleigh • children playing on their sledges/sleds.

sleight The word sleight, most frequently used in the phrase sleight of hand (dexterity in using the hands to perform conjuring tricks, etc.) is sometimes misused and mispronounced. Note the -er spelling and the pronunciation [slétr] not [slay].

slough Slough is pronounced [slou̇], rhyming with how, in the sense 'swamp; state of hopeless dejection': • in the slough of despair, and [slou̇] when referring to the cast-off skin of a snake or the verb 'shed or abandon'.

slow The use of the word slow as an adjective should generally be avoided in formal contexts: • Time passes slowly [not slow] in prison. • You'd better drive slow in this fog.

• The comparative and superlative forms slower and slowest are more informal than more slowly and most slowly: • She eats more slowly/slower than you. • Michael works the slowest/most slowly. Slower may be preferred to more slowly when the adverb is preceded by any: • I can't walk any slower.

The use of the adverb slow in fixed combinations, such as slow-moving traffic, a go-slow, etc., is acceptable in all contexts.

smart In modern usage the adjective smart, meaning 'intelligent', is often applied to devices that use sophisticated electronic technology: • smart card (a plastic bank card with an integral microprocessor) • smart house (a house with computer-controlled heating, lighting, etc.) • smart weapon (a bomb or other missile that can be automatically guided to its target).

smear The increasing use of the noun smear to denote a defamatory attack, often involving slander or libel, is disliked by many users: • Their allegations of professional misconduct are the latest in a series of smears. • the victim of a smear campaign.

• The noun is particularly frequent in the headline language of popular newspapers.

smelled or smelt? Either word may be used as the past tense and past participle of the verb smelt: • The cake smelled/smelt delicious.

See also -ed or -t?

Smelled may be pronounced [smelt] or [smelld]; smelt is always pronounced [smelt].

smiley A smiley is the popular name for an emoticon, a symbol used in electronic communications to indicate the writer's response. The restrictions imposed by keyboards mean that most smileys are rendered sideways.

:-) smiling
:-o smiling back
:-) very happy
:-? sad
:-< very sad
>:| angry
:*) kiss
:| hug

SMS see TEXT MESSAGING.

snail mail see MAIL.

sneaked or snuck? Sneaked is the standard past form of sneak: • They sneaked into the house. The alternative form snuck is disliked by many people, although its history in American English goes back to the 19th century. Today it remains confined largely to the USA.

so The phrase so that, expressing purpose, is sometimes reduced to so in informal contexts. In formal speech and writing the word that should be retained: • The gate had been left open so (that) we could drive in.

• To introduce a result or consequence so may be used alone in all contexts: • The gate had been left open, so we drove in.

The phrase so as, which also expresses purpose, is followed by an infinitive with to and should not be confused with so that: • She wore gloves so as
not to leave fingerprints. • She wore gloves so that [not as] she would not leave fingerprints. So as to is best avoided where it would be adequate: • He closed the window (so as) to keep out the rain.

See also AS; IN ORDER THAT and IN ORDER TO; SO-CALLED.

soar see SAW, SOAR or SORE?

so-called The adjective so-called is generally used in an ironic sense, implying that the following word is inaccurate or inappropriate; • a so-called friend • their so-called supporters • This year's so-called disastrous summer was actually quite good, the London Weather Centre said yesterday (Daily Telegraph).

• The increasing use of the adjective in neutral contexts is disliked by some users: • The so-called black economy regularly comes under fire.

Note that it is unnecessary to put quotation marks around an expression immediately following so-called. • the so-called special services (not the so-called 'special services').

Used without a hyphen after the noun it qualifies, so-called may be interpreted more literally: • the peevish, so-called because of its characteristic cry.

sociable or social? Sociable means 'friendly', 'companionable', or 'convivial'; social means 'of society' or 'promoting companionship'. • a sociable guest • a sociable dinner party • a social worker • a social club.

• The two adjectives are not interchangeable in these senses, although both may be applied to the same noun: • a sociable evening with friends at the pub • a social evening for new members.

Both words also mean 'gregarious', sociable being used in the sense of 'liking the company of others' and social in the sense of 'living with others': • She is more sociable than her sister, who hardly ever goes out. • Ants are social insects.

See also ANTISOCIAL ASOCIAL UNSOCIAL or UNSOCIABLE?

sole or soul? Sole means 'single': • A sole walker paced the beach. It should not be confused with soul, meaning 'spirit'.

solidus The solidus is also known as the stroke, slant, slash mark, oblique, or virgule. Its main use is in separating alternatives: • A doctor must use his/her diagnostic skill in such cases. • You need butter and/or margarine to make pastry.

• It is also used, as in this book, to indicate that both of two alternatives are correct or appropriate: • a terrible/terrific amount of work.

The solidus is used in the percentage sign %, and is sometimes used for writing fractions: • 2/3. It is used instead of the word per in expressions like: • 35 km/hr. Its use in certain abbreviations: • a.c. • d.o. It is also used to separate successive time units: • the financial year 2003/04 • July/August and in dates: • 1/1/03.

A further use of the solidus is to indicate the breaks in lines of verse, when a poem is not set out in its separate lines: • We are the hollow men/We are the stuffed men. Leaning together (T.S. Eliot).

See also SLASH.

soluble or solvable? Either adjective may be used to describe something that can be solved: • a soluble/solvable problem. Soluble is more frequently used to describe something that can be dissolved, especially something that dissolves easily in water: • soluble aspirin.

somebody or someone? The pronoun somebody and its synonym someone are interchangeable in all contexts.

• Both are used with a singular verb but are sometimes followed by a plural personal pronoun or possessive adjective (see THEY): • Somebody/ Someone has parked their car in our drive.

someday, someplace, and sometime Someday and sometime, which both mean 'at some undefined time', are accepted as standard English: • I shall get round to it someday. • We must go there sometime. Someplace, however, is considered an Americanism that should be restricted to informal contexts: • I know I left that file here someplace.

• Note that someday is sometimes rendered as two words: • We met some day soon after the Liberation, whereas sometime is always rendered as one word when used as an adjective or adverb.

See also SOMETIME or SOME TIME?

somersault Note the spelling and pronunciation of this word, which means 'acrobatic roll'. The first two syllables are pronounced like summer, but are spelt somer-: the last syllable is pronounced like salt, but spelt -sault.

-something Many people dislike the frequent use of the words twentsomething, thirtysomething, fortysomething, etc., with
reference to people in their twenties/thirties/forties/etc. These words may be used as adjectives or nouns: • The studio panel was formed... of five well-heeled thirtysomethings artysomethings (Sunday Times). • He was reluctant to admit to being forty-something.
• Are the thirtysomethings leaving childbearing too late for safety? (The Guardian).
• The expression derives originally from the popular 1980s American television series Thirtysomething, which described the lives and lifestyles of a group of people born in the late 1940s or early 1950s and who had therefore reached their thirties during the 1980s.

**sometime or some time?** These spellings are occasionally confused. **Sometime** is used as an adverb to mean 'at some point in time'; • I'll come and see you sometime, and as an adjective to mean 'former'; • Sir Percy Cooper, the sometime President of the Yachting Association. Some time means 'a period of time'; • I need some time to think. • I've been worried about her for some time now.

**sooner** see HARDSLY.

**sophisticated** The adjective **sophisticated** is frequently applied to machines or devices, in the sense of 'complex' or 'advanced'; • Our client... develops and manufactures sophisticated electrical and electronic products and systems (Sunday Times).
• This usage may be extended to the methods or techniques involved in producing such equipment; • sophisticated technology. When it is extended to people, however, there is a risk of confusion with the principal sense of the adjective, 'refined' or 'cultured'; • the best-documented UFO case in history – one which has managed to perplex and astonish some of the most sophisticated scientists in the world (The Bookseller). Some people also dislike the increasing tendency to describe children and adolescents as sophisticated simply because they are at ease with modern technology and have expensive tastes (largely due to their susceptibility to marketing and peer pressure), as such attributes have little to do with refinement or culture.

**sore** see SAW, SOAR or SORE?

**sorry** The adjective **sorry** is followed by the preposition for or about: • I'm sorry for [or about] what I said yesterday.

**sort of** see KIND OF.

**soul** see SOLE or SOUL?

**sound bite** A **sound bite** is a segment of a speech, especially one made by a politician, specifically designed to be extracted for news reports and media coverage. An example of a sound bite is the statement made in 1988 by the then US President George Bush (father of George W. Bush); • Read my lips: no new taxes. Of American origin, the term has become a vogue expression in Britain; • Political debate has been replaced by sound bites and spin.

**source** The use of the word **source** as a verb, meaning 'find a source of', is disliked by many users; • He had difficulty sourcing the material for his thesis.
• In commercial contexts the term sourcing is used with reference to the discovery of suppliers; • Responsible for a team of buyers and accountable for the effective sourcing and procurement of all the company's supplies (Executive Post).

**south, South or southern?** As an adjective, **south** is always written with a capital S when it forms part of a proper name; • South Africa • the South Pole. The noun **south** is usually written with a capital S when it denotes a specific region, such as the southern states of the USA; • The secession of the South precipitated the American Civil War.
• In other contexts, and as an adjective, **south** is usually written with a lower-case s; • Many birds fly **south** for the winter. • Only the south wall of the city remains intact. • The island of Tasmania lies to the south of Australia.

The adjective **southern** is more frequent and usually less specific than the adjective south; • the southern slopes • in southern Italy.

Like **south**, southern is written with a capital S when it forms part of a proper name, such as the Southern Cross. With or without a capital S, it also means 'of the South'; • speaking with a southerly Southern drawl.

**southward or southwards?** **Southward** is the correct choice when an adjective is needed; • a southward direction. Either **southward or southwards** may be used when an adverb is required; • They travelled southward from the city. • The skies were full of birds flying southwards.

See also **-WARD or -WARDS?**

**Soviet** see RUSSIAN or SOVIET?

**sowed or sown?** Either word may be used as the past participle of the verb sow, but
sow is the more frequent: • I have sow/ sowed some more parsley in the herb garden.
  • The past tense of the verb sow is always sowed: • They sowed the field with wheat.
  The verb sow and its derivatives should not be confused with sew (see SEWED or SEWN).

spam Spam is a trade name for a type of tuned chopped meat. With the development of electronic communications, however, it has acquired a new use as a noun referring to unsolicited, usually commercial, messages sent via e-mail to a large number of recipients: • How to block spam on your PC.
  See also FLAMING.

span see SPUN OR SPAN?

spastic The term spastic is no longer considered acceptable as a description for a person who has cerebral palsy and is now also dated as an insult for a person who lacks physical coordination or is in some way incompetent.

spatula The noun spatula, meaning ‘flat-bladed utensil’, is sometimes misspelt. Note that the word ends in -a, not -ar or -er.

-spell Some people object to the overuse of the suffix -spell, meaning ‘jargon’ or ‘characteristic language’, which is attached to nouns, proper names, or prefixes and is derived from the term newspeak coined by George Orwell in his novel Nineteen Eighty-Four: • computerspell • techspell • econospell • Joyrides bill themselves as ‘the travel sickness tablet for children’, which is, to say the least, a cheeky bit of marketing-speak (Sunday Times).
  See also -BABLE.
  • In view of its etymology, it is appropriate that the suffix should have established itself in the English language during the 1980s.

spearhead The verb spearhead is best avoided where lead would be adequate: • an opportunity exists for a profit-oriented manager who can spearhead the company’s continued expansion.

specialty or specialty? Specialty is used in British English and speciality in American English to denote a special skill or interest or a product, service, etc., that is specialized in: • Wildlife photography is his specialty. • Steak tartare is a specialty of the house.

• in British English the noun specialty is sometimes used in place of speciality. It is chiefly used to denote an area of medicine that is specialized in.

specially see ESPECIALLY or SPECIALLY?

species This word is normally pronounced [ˈspiːsɪz]. The alternative pronunciation [ˈspiːsɪz] is avoided by careful users. Like series, the word has the same form in the singular and plural: • a species/several different species.

spectrum The noun spectrum is best avoided where range would be adequate or more appropriate: • a wide spectrum of experience • across the whole spectrum • at the other end of the political spectrum.
• The noun spectrum principally denotes the series of colours produced when white light is dispersed. It has two plural forms, spectra and spectrums.

speculate The verb speculate is followed by the preposition on or about: • There’s no point in speculating on [or about] what might happen.

speeded or sped? Sped is the past tense and past participle of the verb speed in the sense of ‘move or go quickly’; speeded relates to the sense of ‘drive at excessive speed’ and to the phrasal verb speed up, meaning ‘accelerate’: • We sped through the water. • The days have sped by. • He has never sped on a motorway. • The workers speeded up when the supervisor arrived.

spelled or spelt? Either word may be used as the past tense and past participle of the verb spell: • Have I spelt/spelled your name right?
  See also -ED or -R. Spelled may be pronounced [spelt] or [speld]; spelt is always pronounced [spelt].

spellcheckers A spellchecker is a facility in computer software that draws the user’s attention to misspelt words, i.e. words that do not match any word in the computer’s dictionary. It is important to remember that spellcheckers do not highlight words that are correctly spelt but used in the wrong context, e.g. to for too, lead for led, their for there, that for than, or form for from. Overreliance on spellcheckers can result in such mistakes’ being made with increasing frequency.
See also **homo graph, homonym or homophone** and individual entries.

**spelling** English spelling is notoriously difficult to learn, for native English speakers as well as foreign students. However, it is to some extent governed by rules, some of which are described below.

1 **Doubling of consonants** Final consonants are sometimes doubled when a suffix starting with a vowel is added. With single-syllable words this applies when the final consonant is preceded by a single vowel: • hit – hitting • drop – dropped. If the word has more than one syllable, the consonant is doubled if the last syllable is stressed and the final consonant is preceded by a single vowel: • refer – referred • commit – committed. Exceptions are words with a final -c, which is doubled even if the syllable is unstressed: • traveller (but traveler in American English); and • worshipped • has doubled • kidnapped (not always doubled in American English) • leapfrogged • jetlagged • outflab. A final -c is not doubled, but is changed to ch before a suffix beginning with a vowel: • panic – panicked.

2 **y and i** When a suffix is added to a word that ends in -y, the y becomes an i only if the preceding letter is a consonant: • silly – sillier • hurry – hurried. Exceptions are: • said • laid • paid in words where a suffix beginning with an i is added, such as -ing: • try – trying.

3 **Final -e** When a suffix beginning with a vowel is added to a word with a silent final -e, the e is dropped: • rate – rating. A growing trend is to drop the -e before the suffixes -able and -age: • likeable – likable • wiseable – wiseable • mileage – milage. If the word ends in -ge or -ce the e is not dropped before a and o: • outrageous • paceable. The e is not dropped if the suffix begins with a consonant: • excitement, except -ly (see 4 below).

4 **-ly suffix** When -ly is added to a word it remains unchanged except for the endings -ll and -le which change to -lly and -ly: • nice – nicely • full – fully • noble – nobly. Exceptions are: • truly • duly • wholly.

5 **ie and ei** The rule 'i before e except after c' applies to most words where the sound those letters represent is [ei]. Examples of words that have 'i before e' include: • achieve • belief • believe • brief • chief • diesel • field • frieze • grief • hygiene • niece • piece • priest • relief • relieve • revive • shield • shriek • siege • thief • yield. Examples of words 'except after c' include: • ceiling • conceit • conceive • deceit • deceive • perceive • receipt • receive. Exceptions include: • caffeine • Keith • Neil • protein • revise • Sheila • species • wear • weird. When the sound represented is [ay] then ei is used: • beige • design • eight • feign • feint • freight • heinous • neighbour • reign • rein • reindert • sleigh • veil • vein • weigh • weight.

See also -able or -ible?; -ae and -oe?; AMERICANisms; -ant or -ent?; -ize or -ise?; plurals; and individual entries.

**spelt** see **spelled or spelt**?

**spend** The use of the word spend as a noun, meaning 'amount spent' or 'amount to be spent': • an advertising spend of £20,000, is disliked by many people and is best replaced by an appropriate synonym or paraphrase.

**spilled or spilt?** Either word may be used as the past tense and past participle of the verb spilt: • He has spilt/spilled his coffee. • The children spilt/spilt out of the school.

See also -ed or -r?

**Splint** is the usual form of the adjective in British English: • It's no use crying over spilt milk.

Spilled may be pronounced [spild] or [spilt]; spilt is always pronounced [spilt].

**spin** In recent years the word spin has acquired a new meaning, referring to the practice of presenting or interpreting facts or events in a favourable light: • This story is a prime example of Labour government spin.

• A spin doctor is a person employed by a political party, government department, etc., to manipulate the organization's public face in the light of current events: • Almost everyone who took part in the travelling circus of the election became so bewitched by the spin doctors, photo opportunities and in-jokes of each campaign that we lost sight of one fundamental reality (The Observer).

The expression derives from the spin given to a ball in certain sports in order to control its direction through the air or the way in which it bounces.

**split infinitive** A split infinitive occurs when an adverb is inserted between to and the infinitive form of a verb: • to
spoiled

boldly go. The practice is disliked by some but very widely used: • Microsoft, the world’s largest software corporation, would be forced to radically alter the way it does business with rivals and suppliers (The Guardian).

• Split infinitives have a long history and the objection to them is comparatively recent. As with the opposition to ending sentences with prepositions, grammarians based their objections on the rules of Latin grammar.

Since so many people dislike split infinitives it is probably best to try to avoid them, at least in formal speech and writing. They can sound awkward or unpleasant, particularly when more than one word comes between to and the verb: • He tries to on the one hand explain . . . However, there are some sentences where it is preferable to split an infinitive, especially in order to avoid ambiguity. • He failed to comprehend me entirely would suggest complete, not partial, failure. • We expect to further modernize our services. The revised ordering We expect to further modernize . . . suggests moreover. • They were plotting secretly to destroy the files. Was the plotting or the intended destruction secret? • I would not expect anyone who has not read Joyce fully to understand the play. Read Joyce fully or understand fully?

Another argument for disregarding the rule is that sometimes the rhythm of spoken English makes the split infinitive sound natural and its avoidance awkward. Compare: I hope to really enjoy myself with I hope really to enjoy myself.

spoiled or spilt? Either word may be used as the past tense and past participle of the verb spill: • The bad weather spilt/spoil our holiday.

See also -ed or -t?

Spilt is the usual form of the adjective in British English: • a spilt child.

Spoiled may be pronounced [spoid] or [spolt]; spilt is always pronounced [spolt].

spokesman or spokeswoman? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

spoonful Most users prefer to form the plural -fuls: • spoonfuls. See -FUL.

sportsman or sportswoman? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

spouse The use of the noun spouse in place of husband or wife is best avoided where the sex of the person is known: • The broadcaster Sue Baker and her husband [not spouse] were the guests of honour.

• The words spouse and spouses may, however, serve as useful replacements for the phrases ‘husband or wife’, ‘husbands and wives’, etc., especially in formal contexts: • Please give details of any other properties owned by you or your spouse.

• Use of the car park is restricted to members and their spouses.

The noun spouse is usually pronounced [spouz], the pronunciation [spouz] being an accepted variant.

sprung or sprang? Sprang and sprung are both used as the past tense of the verb spring. Sprang is the standard form in British English: • The man sprang from the bushes. Both sprang and sprung are commonly used in American English: • She sprang out of the door. • The lizard sprang out of his hand. Note that sprung is the only acceptable form of the past participle in both British and American English: • The lizard had sprung out of his hand.

spun or span? Span is the past tense and past participle of the verb spin in modern usage; span is an archaic form of the past tense: • He spun the wheel. • This yarn has been spun by hand.

squalor This word, meaning ‘dirtiness; wretchedness’: • the squalor of the slums, is sometimes misspelt. In both British and American English the ending is -or as in tremor, not -o(r) as in colour.

squaw Squaw is a Narragansett word meaning ‘woman’ and became a generic term for any woman of Native American origin. In recent years, however, the word has acquired negative connotations through its more general use and it is now considered unacceptable in virtually every context.

squeaky clean The adjective squeaky clean, which originated in advertising, is often used in the figurative sense of beh-
yon reproach’ or ‘above suspicion’; • the squeaky clean image of this generation of pop-stars • The president must be squeaky clean.

Users of this expression should be aware of its possible derogatory connotations; there may be an implication that the person or thing so described is too good to be true.

stadia? Stadiums is the more usual plural of the noun stadium, but either word may be used: • New football stadiums have been built throughout Britain in recent years; • The city has two football stadia.

stair or stairs? Stair means ‘one of a series of steps’; • The stair creaked beneath his foot. It should not be confused with stair, which means ‘look hard’; • She stared in horror. • a sad, faraway stare.

stalactite or stalagmite? Stalactites and stalagmites are tapering masses of calcium carbonate that form in limestone caves. A stalactite hangs from the roof; a stalagmite rises from the floor.

• The classic method of distinguishing between the two words is to associate the c of stalactite with that of ceiling and the g of stalagmite with that of ground.

stanch or staunch? Either word may be used as a verb, meaning ‘stop (the flow of); staunch being more frequent than stanch in modern usage: • I stanchioned/stanch the flow of blood with a handkerchief, • She stanchioned/stanched the wound. • This offer is no remedy to recruitment and retention problems within our universities: It won’t stanch the brain drain (The Guardian).

• Stanch is also a rare variant of the adjective staunch, meaning ‘loyal’ or ‘firm’; • a staunch supporter.

The word stanch is pronounced [stænʃ]. Staunch is occasionally pronounced in the same way, but its usual pronunciation is [stʌnʃ], rhyming with launch.

standing or stood? The substitution of the verb stood, for the past participle of the verb stand, for the present participle standing is found in some dialects of English: • She was standing [in some dialects stood] in front of the mirror.

• Stood is correctly used in the passive form of the transitive verb stand: • The bottle should be stood in a cool place for two hours.

stank or stunk? Either word may be used as the past tense of the verb stink, but stank is the only form of its past participle: • The room stank/stunk of cigarette smoke. • These boots have stunk [not stank] of manure since my visit to the farm last week.

stare see STAIR or STAIRS?

state-of-the-art The adjective state-of-the-art, which relates to the current level of technical achievement, development, knowledge, etc., is disliked by some users:

• Heart of the system is a state-of-the-art desktop copier with a host of time-saving features (Sunday Times). • state-of-the-art computer technology.

• It is best avoided where modern or up-to-date would be adequate or more appropriate: • They [Venture Scouts] use state-of-the-art camp stoves for cooking (Daily Telegraph).

statesman or stateswoman? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

stationary or stationery? These two words are often confused. Stationary means ‘not moving’; • a stationary car; stationery means ‘writing materials’; • office stationery.

• To avoid confusion remember that stationery is sold by a stationer, a trader whose name, like baker and grocer, ends in -er.

statistics see -ics.

status In British English the word status should be pronounced [ˈsteɪtəs], with the first syllable like state. The pronunciation [ˈsteɪnəs], with the first syllable as in static, is an American English variant.

staunch see STANCH or STANCIUS?

stay or stop? The substitution of the verb stop for stay in the sense of ‘reside temporarily’ or ‘remain’ is found in some dialects of English: • We stayed [in some dialects stopped] with my sister for a few days.

• The use of the verb stop with reference to a break in a journey is generally acceptable: • We stopped at my sister’s house for a cup of tea on the way home.

steal see BURGLE, ROB or STEAL?

steal or steel? Steal means ‘take something illegally’; • He stole three cars in two days. It should not be confused with steel, which refers to a hard alloy of iron: • The building is mostly steel and glass. In informal contexts, steal is a noun meaning ‘bargain’: • At £10 it’s a steal.
**step** or **steppe**  Step variously means 'foot-step', 'footprint', 'raised surface', 'stage in progress', etc.: • He paused a few steps away from the body. • She heard steps on the floor above. • She mounted the step. • The next step will be to contact the vendors. It should not be confused with steppe, which denotes a broad, treeless plain: • the harsh climate of the Siberian steppes.

**step**  see **HALF** or **STEP**?

**stereo**  This word has the alternative pronunciations [ˈstɛrɪʊ] and [ˈstɛrɪəʊ], both of which are acceptable, although the former is more frequent in contemporary usage.

**steward** or **stewardess**  see **NON-SEX** TERMS.

**sticky**  The word sticky has acquired at least two new meanings in recent years. Many people use it to refer to small self-adhesive squares of paper widely used as memos in everyday life: • She pressed a sticky on the front door to remind her husband to feed the pets. It is also used in computing to describe the electronic equivalent of a paper reminder: • A sticky popped up on the screen reminding him to check his e-mail. The term may also be encountered in electronic communications as an adjective describing an Internet site that attracts and retains large numbers of visitors.

**stiletto**  Note the spelling of this word, which refers to a woman's shoe with a high narrow heel, particularly the -l- and the -tt-.

• The plural is either stilettos or stilettos, the former being accepted by more authorities.

**stimulant** or **stimulus**? Both these nouns are used to denote something that stimulates activity. Stimulant is specifically applied to drugs, alcohol, etc., whereas stimulus is a more general synonym for 'incentive': • Caffeine is a stimulant. • They responded to the stimulus of competition. A stimulant increases activity; a stimulus initiates activity.

• The plural of stimulus is stimuli, which may be pronounced [ˈstimjuːli] or [ˈstimuˌliː].

**stimulate**  see **SIMULATE** or **STIMULATE**?

**stimulus**  see **SIMULANT** or **STIMULUS**?

**stoical**  The adjective stoical, meaning 'resigned to or unaffected by suffering': • a stoical attitude to death, is pronounced [ˈstəʊkl]. The -o- and -i- are pronounced separately, not as the oi sound of soil.

• The word stoic may be used as a variant of stoical or as a noun: • She's a real stoic.

Spelt with a capital S-, the noun and adjective Stoic refer to a school of ancient Greek philosophy.

**stood**  see **STANDING** or **STOOD**?

**stop**  see **STAY** or **STOP**?

**storey** or **story**? These two spellings are sometimes confused. The word storey, meaning 'level of a building': • He lives on the second storey. • a multi-storey car park, is spelt with an e; the plural is storeys. Story means 'tale': • Tell me a story; its plural is stories.

• In American English the sense 'level of a building' may also be spelt story, with the plural stories.

**straight** or **straight?**  The word straight is most frequently used as an adjective or adverb: • a straight line • I went straight there. It is sometimes used as a noun, meaning 'straight line or part': • the home straight (of a racecourse). The word straight is an archaic adjective meaning 'narrow; restricted'; in modern usage it is most frequently found in the form of the plural noun straits, meaning 'difficult circumstances': • in dire straits. In the sense of 'narrow channel', the noun strait (or straits) also occurs in proper names: • The Straits of Dover.

• The two words have different origins: straight comes from the Old English streccan 'to stretch', whereas strait is ultimately derived from the Latin stringere 'to bind tightly'.

The two spellings are interchangeable only in certain compound words (see STRAIT/JACKET and STRAIT/LACED).

See also **STRAIGHTENED** or **STRAIGHTENED**?

**straightaway** or **straight away**? This expression, meaning 'without delay': • I'll be going to the shops straightaway, may be written as one word or two.

**straightened** or **straitened**? These words are sometimes confused. Straightened means 'made straight': • The road has been straightened. Straitened, which is derived from the archaic adjective strait (see STRAIGHT or STRAIT?), means 'restricted': • in straitened circumstances.
** Strait** see **straight** or **straight?**

** Straitened** see **straightened** or **straightened?**

** Straitjacket** and **straitlaced** A *straitjacket*, a constricting jacket used to restrain a violent person, and also in extended senses, 'something that restricts', may also be spelt *straightjacket*: • The government finds itself in a straitjacket/straightjacket. In the same way, straitlaced, meaning 'puritanical', may also be spelt straightlaced: • a very straitlaced/straightlaced maiden aunt.

See also **straight** or **straight?**

** Straita** see **stratum** or **strata?**

** Stratagem** or **strategy**? A *stratagem* is a scheme, trick, or ruse; *strategy* is the art of planning a campaign: • to devise a new stratagem • the strategy involved in a game of chess.

♦ The use of *strategy* in the extended sense of 'plan' or 'method' overlaps with that of *stratagem*.

Both nouns are ultimately derived from the Greek word for 'a general' and are principally applied to warfare, a stratagem being an artifice for deceiving the enemy and strategy being the science or art of conducting a war.

** Stratum** or **strata?** *Strata* is the plural form of the noun *stratum*: • from a different social stratum • in one of the upper strata of the rock.

♦ The use of *strata* as a singular noun is wrong, but nevertheless is occurring with increasing frequency, especially in figurative contexts: • in that strata of society.

** Street** see **road** or **street?**

** Street**- In such words and phrases as *streetwise* and *street credibility*, *street* refers to the culture of young people, especially young working-class inhabitants of the inner cities: • a streetwise kid. • This year's batch of school-leavers are optimistic and streetwise, according to a study commissioned by the TSB bank (The Guardian). The meaning has recently widened to include the culture of those familiar with the latest trends, fashions, topical issues, etc.: • to be successful in the public relations industry, you need more than just street credibility. • Ladars and Skodas snubbed as car thieves opt for 'street cred' (headline, The Guardian).

See also *-cred.*

♦ Street is occasionally used as an adjective in slang usage in its own right, meaning 'accepted by young people or those familiar with the latest trends, etc.': • He isn't street enough.

** Strength** This word is sometimes mispronounced [strength]. The correct pronunciation is [strenth], but the variant pronunciation [strenkth] is acceptable to most users.

** Stress** Some languages have a fairly regular stress pattern but English stress patterns are varied and subject to change over time. As foreign words become absorbed into the English language they often change their stress to a more English-sounding one: • bureau • chauffeur.

♦ Two-syllable words are more likely to be stressed on the first syllable, but when a word serves as both a noun (or adjective) and a verb it is normally stressed on the first syllable as a noun (or adjective), but the second as a verb: • permit • rebel • present • conflict • insult • absent.

Most three-syllable words have their stress on the first syllable, and several of those words which have their stress on the second are widely coming to be pronounced with the stress on the first: • contribute • subsidence. Words with four or more syllables usually have their stress on the second or third syllable. Some people find difficulty in pronouncing those multisyllabic words that traditionally have been stressed on the first syllable and such words are coming to be pronounced with the stress on a later syllable: • applicable • demonstrable • formidable.

Individual words may be stressed in speech for emphasis: in written and printed texts such words are indicated by italics: • I like walking in the rain.

See also **intonation**.

** Stringed** or **strung?** *Stringed* is an adjective derived from the noun *string*; *strung* is the past tense and past participle of the verb *string*: • a strung instrument • a twelve-stringed guitar • His squash racket was strung by an expert. • The children (have) strung decorations around the room.

♦ *Strung* is also used adjectively before a noun, often in combination with an adverb: • a newly strung violin.

** Strive** The verb *strive* is followed by the preposition for or after: • Some minority groups are still striving for (or after) equality of opportunity.

** Student** see **pupil** or **student?**
stumble
The verb *stumble* is followed by the preposition *across* or *on*: • *I stumbled across* [or on] *the solution to the problem.*

stunk see STANK or STUNK?
stupefy This word, meaning *bewilder or amaze*, is sometimes misspelt. Note the ending *-fy* (like *paralyse*), in spite of the spelling of the related word *stupid.*

stupor This word, meaning 'a drowsy dazed state': • *in a drunken stupor*, is sometimes misspelt. Note the final *-or*, as in *torpor*, rather than *-our."

subconscious or unconscious? Both these adjectives mean 'without (full) awareness', but *subconscious* implies a greater degree of consciousness than *unconscious*: • a subconscious desire • unconscious resentment.  
* In psychology both words relate to parts of the mind that can influence behaviour.

(unconscious has the additional senses of 'not conscious', 'unaware', and 'unintentional': • *I lay unconscious for two hours*. • *They were unconscious of the danger*. • It was an unconscious insult.

subject The subject of a clause or sentence is the noun, pronoun, or phrase that controls the verb (see also ACTIVE, PASSIVE). The subject usually precedes the verb, unless the clause or sentence is a question. In the sentence: • *The dog buried the bone, the dog is the subject*. In the sentence: • *Does he like them?*, the pronoun *he* is the subject.  
* In more complex sentences, the subject may be a clause, such as Why she resigned in the sentence: • Why she resigned remains a mystery. 

The subject determines the form of the verb: a singular subject is used with a singular verb and a plural subject is used with a plural verb: • *She often goes to the cinema* [singular subject she, singular verb goes]. • *The children go to school by bus* [plural subject children, plural verb go]. • The legs of the table are loose; in the last example, note that the verb agrees with the legs, not with the table.

Compare OBJECT.

See also PREDICATE: SINGULAR or PLURAL?

subjective see OBJECTIVE or SUBJECTIVE?

sub judice The legal term *sub judice* is Latin in origin and is used to refer to a case that is still being considered by a court of law and therefore cannot be discussed in public: • He declined to comment further as the matter was still sub judice.

• The expression is pronounced *[sub judis]*, its literal meaning is 'under a judge'.

subjunctive The *subjunctive* is the grammatical set ('mood') of forms of a verb used to express possibilities or wishes rather than facts. With most verbs the subjunctive form is its basic form minus the -e ending of the third person singular, but to be has the past tense subjunctive *were*. The subjunctive is largely falling into disuse but survives in such idioms as: • *be that as it may* • *as it were* • *far be it from me* • *come what may*.

• The main use of subjunctives is in clauses introduced by that and expressing a proposal, desire, or necessity: • *It is vital that she leave immediately.*

• *I suggested to Mark that he drop in for a coffee sometime.*

• They demanded that he answer their questions. This usage is more popular in American English than in British English, where *should* is often inserted before the verb: • *It is vital that she should leave immediately.*

The other use of subjunctives is in clauses introduced by if, though, or supposing: • *If you were to go, you might regret it.* • *It's not as though he were a bachelor.* It is now very unusual to use such a construction with any subjunctive form other than were.

See also IF; WERE or WAS?

subordinate clause see CLAUSE.

subpoena This word, referring to a writ requiring a person to appear in court, is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the -oe-. The pronunciations *[subpeenə]* or *[sub-penə]* are both acceptable.

• The word comes from the Latin sub poena, meaning 'under penalty'.

The present participle of the verb *subpoena* 'issue with a subpoena' is *subpoenaing*; the past tense and past participle are *subpoenaed*, pronounced *[-peened]*.

subsequent see CONSEQUENT or SUBSEQUENT?

subsidence The traditional pronunciation of this word, which means 'falling or sinking': • cracked due to subsidence, is *[sub-sidenə]*.

• The alternative pronunciation *[sub-sidenz]* is also widely used and is generally acceptable.

subsidiarity The noun *subsidiarity* is often used in the context of the European Union,
where it refers to the principle that political decisions should be made at the lowest level. Thus some issues may be dealt with by countries that belong to the EU rather than by the EU itself.

**subsidiary** The noun and adjective *subsidiary*, which means 'auxiliary; subordinate', is sometimes misspelt. Note that the word ends in *-ary*, not *-ary* or *-ary*.

**substance abuse or substance misuse** These terms are often treated as synonymous, although *substance abuse* always implies deliberate misuse of drugs, chemicals, etc., while *substance misuse* can encompass both deliberate and accidental misuse.

**substantial or substantive?** Both these adjectives refer to the basic substance or essence of something, but neither is in frequent use in this sense. *Substantial* usually means 'of considerable size, importance, etc.:
- a substantial improvement
- a substantial meal. *Substantive*, a rarer word, is used to mean 'real; firm'.

In grammar, the word *substantive* is a noun or adjective relating to words that have the function of a noun.

Note that *substantive* is stressed on the second syllable [ˈsʌbstəntɪv]. As a noun substantive is stressed on the first syllable, but as an adjective it is more frequently stressed on the second syllable [ˈsʌbˈstɑntɪv].

Some people object to the use of *substantial* as a pretentious synonym for 'large', 'big', etc.;
- a substantial increase in income.

The increasing tendency to use substantive in this sense is widely regarded as incorrect;
- substantive numbers of students are opting for more vocational courses.

**substitute see replace or substitute**

**subsume** The verb *subsume* means 'incorporate within a larger category or group' or 'classify under a general rule or heading'; it should not be used as a pretentious synonym for 'include' or 'contain';
- *The concept of a classless society is subsumed within the doctrine of Marxism."

**subtle** This word, meaning 'slight', 'understood', or 'ingenious';
- subtle differences in meaning;
- subtle nuances, is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the *-b- in the middle of the word.

The word is pronounced [səˈbʌlt].

**succeed see accede or exceed**

**successfully or successfully?** These two adverbs are sometimes confused. *Successfully* means 'with success'; *successively* means 'in succession';
- *The surgeons operated successfully.*
- *The sales figures fell for several months successively.*

**such** The use of the construction *such... that (or such... who)* in place of *such... as* is avoided by careful users;
- *such tools as [not that]* are needed for the job;
- *such people as [not who] are eligible for supplementary benefit.*

The construction *such... that may, however, be used to indicate a result;*;
- *He earns such a pitance that he can't afford to buy food for his family.*

The use of *such as/such an* before an adjective preceding a noun, in the sense of 'so' or 'very', is disliked by a few users but acceptable to most;
- *Such careless driving should not go unpunished.*
- *I have never seen such a small house.*
- *You have such beautiful clothes.*
- *It was such a difficult question.*

The phrase *such that* is reserved for constructions describing the consequences of something;
- *The gravity of the situation was such that the whole project was threatened.*

See also *such as or like?*

**such as or like?** *Such as* introduces an example; *like* introduces a comparison;
- *Dairy products, such as milk and cheese, should be kept in a cool place.*
- *Dairy products, like fresh meat, should be kept in a cool place.*
- *He directed several horror films, such as Dracula.*
- *He directed several horror films like Dracula.*

The potentially ambiguous use of *like in place of such as* is disliked by some people but frequently occurs in general usage;
- *He gave Danielle gifts like a £1,500 ruby and diamond necklace, a matching ring and earrings (Daily Telegraph).*

The use of *such as in place of like is largely restricted to formal contexts;*
- *Shoes such as these are ideal for indoor sports.*

Careful users avoid substituting *such as for as;*
- *When the Post Office is closed, as [not such as] on Sundays, stamps may be obtained from the machine outside.*
- *The pizza can be cooked in a number of ways, as by [not such as by] baking it in a hot oven for twenty minutes.* In the second example *as by* may be replaced by such as.

**suffer from or suffer with?** Suffer from
### SUFFIXES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suffix</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-able, -ible</td>
<td>1 able to be...: 1 enjoyable 2 that may cause: 1 objectionable 3 that belongs to: 1 fashionable see -ABLE or -IBLE?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-age</td>
<td>an action, condition, or charge: a breakage + postage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-aholic</td>
<td>obsessed by...; addicted to: a shopaholic see -AHOLIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-al</td>
<td>1 an action: 2 removal 2 relating to: a postal + central + dental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-an, -ian</td>
<td>1 (a person) coming from a country: 1 Canadian 2 a person who is an expert at something: a mathematician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ance, -ence, -ancy, -ency</td>
<td>a quality, state, or action: 1 assistance + ascendency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ant, -ent</td>
<td>1 (a person or thing) that does something: 1 pleasant + student + dependent see -ANT or -ENT?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ar</td>
<td>like, belonging to: a solar + molecular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ary</td>
<td>1 connected with: a monetary 2 a person doing something: a missionary 3 a place for: a avary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ate</td>
<td>1 having a quality: 2 fortunate 2 a chemical compound: 3 carbonate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-atic</td>
<td>(used to make adjectives): a problematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ation</td>
<td>an action, state, or condition: a pronunciation + moderation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-able</td>
<td>means 'have (an illness or disability)'; suffer with means 'experience pain or discomfort because of (an illness or disability)': 1 suffer from hay fever. 1 I have been suffering with my hay fever today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ed</td>
<td>1 (used to make the past tense and past participles of verbs): 1 extended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ee</td>
<td>1 a person to whom something is done or given: 1 addressee 2 a person in a particular state or condition: 1 refugee see -EE or -ER?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-eer</td>
<td>a person who does something or is concerned with something: a mountaineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-en</td>
<td>1 (cause to) become: 1 harden 2 made of: 1 wooden</td>
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<tr>
<td>-enabled</td>
<td>capable of working with: 1 WAP-enabled see ENABLE</td>
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<tr>
<td>-ence, -ency</td>
<td>see -ance</td>
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<tr>
<td>-ent</td>
<td>see -ant</td>
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<tr>
<td>-er</td>
<td>1 (also -r) (used to make the comparative of adjectives): 1 faster 2 nicer 3 rider 1 (also -r) 1 a person or thing that does something: 1 cooker 1 sailor + transmitter 3 a person working in a job: 1 writer + painter 1 a person who lives in a place: 1 Londoner 5 a person or thing that has or is something: 1 teenager see -EE or -ER? -ER or -OR?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ery, -ry</td>
<td>1 a place where an activity or business is done: 1 bakery 2 a group of things: 1 cutlery 3 a condition: 1 bravery 4 the practice of: 1 cookery see -S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-es</td>
<td>a place of origin or language: a Chinese + journalese (used to make the feminine of nouns): a lioness + countess see -ESS (used to make the superlative of adjectives): a fastest + tidest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-est</td>
<td>1 small: 1 cigarette 2 (used to make feminine nouns): 1 usherette</td>
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<tr>
<td>-ette</td>
<td>1 having a number of parts or multiplied by a number: 1 fivefold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ful</td>
<td>1 having a quality: 2 painful 2 the amount that a... can hold: a spoonful see -FUL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-fold</td>
<td>make or become: 1 simplify + liquify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-fy, -ify</td>
<td>make or become: 1 simplify + liquify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-gate</td>
<td>a political scandal: 1 irragate see -GATE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ge</td>
<td>an angle: a polygon</td>
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<tr>
<td>-hood</td>
<td>a state or condition; time of being something: a manhood + childhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>-i</td>
<td>-l</td>
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<tr>
<td>-ian</td>
<td>see -an</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
-ible see -able

-ic, -ical related to: poetic; fanatic see -ic or -ical?

-ice (used to make abstract nouns): cowardice

-ics a science, subject, or group of activities: physics; politics; acrobatics see -ics

-ide a chemical compound: cyanide

-ie see -y

-ify see -fy

-in made of; like; connected with: crystalline

-ing 1 (used to make the present participle of verbs): eating an action, process, or result; thing: meeting; wedding; welding see -ing forms

-ion an action, process, or state: creation; tension

-ious having a quality; suspicious

-ise see -ize

-ish 1 (belonging to) a country or language: Swedish; 2 about: seventeenth; 3 like, having the bad qualities of: childish; foolish

-ism 1 a system of beliefs, etc.: socialism

-ist 1 a person following a system of beliefs, etc.: communist

-ite a disease; tonsillitis

-ity, -ty a quality, state, or condition: stupidity; flexibility

-ive that will cause something, having a quality: productive; digestive

-ize, -ise make or become: equalize; see -ize or -ise?

-less not having: harmless

-let something small: droplet

-like like: dreamlike; see -like

-ling someone or something small: duckling

-logy a science or subject: biology; geology

-ly 1 (used to make adverbs): nicely

2 having qualities of: brotherly

3 happening at regular times: yearly

-man a person who lives in a place or does something: chairman

-ment a state, condition, quality, result, or process: enjoyment; management

-mess the utmost: eastmost

-ness a state, quality, or condition; example of this: kindness

-nik person connected with . . .: refusenik

-oid like; humanoid

-or see -er

-ous having a quality; poisonous

-phile (a person) liking something very much: francophile

-phobia fear: claustrophobia

-proof resisting something: waterproof

-r see -er

-rage outburst of anger; road rage

-ry see -ery

-s, -es 1 (used to make plurals): books; pencils; horses

2 (used to make the third person singular of present tense of verbs): eats; rides

's of . . .: John's; house's; children's

* houses' see *s or *'s?

-ship 1 a state; friendship 2 a skill; craftsmanship

-some causing: troublesome

-speak jargon, characteristic language: computerspeak see -speak

-th 1 (used to make adjectives from numbers): fifth

2 a state; width

-an action, process, state, or result; thing: completion; imagination

-tion in a direction: homewards see -ward or -wards?

-ty see -ity

-ward, -wards showing direction: sideways see -wise or -ways?

-wise 1 in such a way; crosswise 2 as far as . . . is concerned: weatherwise

-woman a woman who lives in a place or does something; saleswoman

-y 1 having a quality; dusty; sandy

2 (also -ie) used as an affectionate name; small: bunny

3 the act of doing something; condition or state: enquiry; envy
sui generis

The Latin expression *sui generis* is used in formal contexts to refer to a unique person or thing, one that is in a class of its own. • The taxation rules were *sui generis,* and could not be applied generally.

* The expression means literally 'of its own kind' and is pronounced (soo *generis*).

**suit** or **suite**? These two nouns should not be confused. A *suit* is a set of clothes, one of the four sets of playing cards, or an action in a court of law: • A *trouser suit* • to follow *suit* • a *lawsuit.* A *suite* is a set of furniture, a set of rooms, a group of followers, or a musical composition with several movements: • to *redeploy a suite* • the *honey-moon suite* • a *ballet suite.*

* Suite and suite are most frequently confused in the expressions three-piece suite (a pair of trousers, a jacket, and a waistcoat) and three-piece suite (a sofa and two armchairs).

Note the difference in pronunciation between the two words: *suite* is pronounced (sweat); *suit* is pronounced (soot) or (siut), although the last of these pronunciations is becoming less frequent and may be considered old-fashioned.

**suite** or **sweet**? These two words are occasionally confused since they are both pronounced (sweet). *Suite* variously means 'set of matching furniture,' etc. (see *suit* or *suite*): • a new suite of software applications; • This *suite* is the composer’s masterpiece. • He arrived with a suite of advisers. It should not be confused with *sweet,* which as a noun refers to a chocolate, toffee, etc.: • What is your favourite *sweet*? and as an adjective means 'sugary,' 'pleasing,' 'kind,' etc.: • a *sweet taste* • a *sweet gesture* • How sweet of them!

**summon** or **summons**? To *summon* is to send for, call upon, or muster; to *summons* is to serve with a legal summons (an order to appear in court): • I was summoned to the managing director’s office. • He was summoned for speeding.

* The verb *summon* may be used in place of the verb *summons.* • He was summoned for speeding.

Of the two words only *summons* is used as a noun: • I received a summons from the managing director. • He received a summons for speeding.

**sunk, sunken** see **sink, sunk or sunken**?

**super-** Some people object to the frequent use of the prefix *super-* in the sense of 'surpassing all others' or 'to an excessive degree,' to coin new nouns and adjectives: • a *superbug that is resistant to most antibiotics* • those *superfit people who put the rest of us to shame.*

See also **macro-** and **micro;** **mega-**.

**supercilious** This word, meaning 'haughty in a condescending disdainful manner,' is sometimes misspelt. Note the single *c* and single *l.*

**superior** The adjective *superior* is followed by the preposition to: • This wine is superior to the wine we had in the restaurant.

**superlative** see **comparative** and **superlative.**

**supersedes** This word, meaning 'replace,' is sometimes misspelt. The most frequent mistake is to confuse the *-sede* ending with the *-cede* ending of precede.

* Supersedes comes from the Latin *supersedere,* 'to sit above.'

**supervise** *Supervise,* meaning 'oversee': • She supervised the plans for the party, is sometimes misspelt; the *-ise* ending cannot be spelt *-ise: see *size* or *size?*

* Note also the *-ending of superior,* not -er.

**supine** see **prostrate, prone or supine?**

**supper** see **dinner, lunch, tea or supper?**

**supplement** see **complement or supplement?**

**suppose or supposing?** Either word may be used to introduce a suggestion or hypothesis, *suppose* being preferred by some users in formal contexts: • Suppose/Supposing we sell the car? • Suppose/Supposing the train is late.

* Only *supposing* can be used in the sense of *if* or *assuming:* • I’ll buy her some chocolates on the way home, supposing the corner shop is still open.

**suppress** see **oppress, repress or suppress?**

**sure** This word, pronounced (shor), is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the *su-* at the beginning of the word.

* The use of *sure* as an intensifying adverb is disliked by many people and is best restricted to very informal contexts: • I was sure relieved to see your car.

**surf** see **serf** or **surf**?

**surprised** *Surprised* is followed by the preposition by in the sense of 'taken unawares'
and by at in the sense of ‘amazed’: • The thief was surprised by the owner of the car. • I was surprised at her ignorance.

In the second sense surprised may also be followed by an infinitive with to or a clause introduced by that: • He was surprised to see you. • They were surprised that we won.

The idiomatic use of a Double Negative in such sentences as I shouldn’t be surprised if it doesn’t rain is acceptable to most users in informal contexts, provided that the meaning is clear. The construction is best avoided if there is a risk of ambiguity.

**surveillance** This word, meaning ‘careful observation’, is usually pronounced [sɜːrveɪləns]. The pronunciation [sɜːrvələns], imitating the French original, sounds rather affected.

**susceptible** The adjective susceptible is followed by the preposition to in the sense of ‘easily influenced or affected’ and by of in the formal sense of ‘capable’ or ‘admitting’: • susceptible to flattery • susceptible to hay fever • susceptible of a different interpretation.

Note that susceptible ends in -ible, not -able. The -sc combination can also cause spelling mistakes.

**suspect or suspicious?** The word suspect may be used as a verb, noun, or adjective. Suspicious functions only as an adjective. In its adjectival sense of ‘causing suspicion’ or ‘open to suspicion’, suspect is sometimes virtually synonymous with suspicious: • a suspect/suspicious package • The scheme sounds rather suspect/suspicious. However, only suspicious can be used in the sense of ‘feeling or showing suspicion’: • The police were suspicious [not suspect] of her behaviour. Similarly, only suspect can be used in the sense of ‘possibly false or unreliable’: • a suspect banknote • The braking system is suspect. As a noun, suspect describes a person who is under suspicion of being responsible for a crime or other misconduct.

Note the difference in pronunciation between the verb suspect, which is stressed on the second syllable (suspekt), and the noun and adjective; stressed on the first syllable (suspekt).

**suspense or suspension?** Both these nouns are derived from the verb suspend, meaning ‘hang’. Suspense is largely restricted to the figurative sense of ‘a state of uncertainty, anxiety, insecurity, or excitement’: • Don’t keep me in suspense any longer! Suspension means ‘the act of suspending’ or ‘the state of being suspended’; it is also used in the figurative senses of ‘interruption, deferment, postponement’ and ‘temporary debarment or expulsion’: • the suspension of an insurance policy • The offending players face suspension from the team. The two nouns are not interchangeable in any context.

**suspicious** see **suspect** or **suspicious**?

**sustainable** In modern usage the adjective sustainable has developed a specialized application to natural resources that can be renewed: • sustainable forests, and to activities that do not damage the environment: • sustainable development.

**swam or swum?** Swam is the past tense of the verb swim; swum is the past participle: • The dog swam to the shore. • the lake where they had swum.

**swap or swop?** Both spellings are acceptable for this informal word meaning ‘exchange’: • to swap stamps • swop homes for a holiday. Swap is the more traditional spelling, but swop is a frequently used variation.

The Middle English swapen from which the word originates meant ‘to strike’, from the custom of striking or shaking hands on a bargain.

**swat or swot?** These spellings are sometimes confused. Swat means ‘strike with a blow’: • to swat flies. This word may also be spelt swot, although this spelling is disliked by many careful users. Swat is an informal word meaning ‘study hard’: • swotting for exams.

**sweet** see **DESSERT. SWEET, PUDDING or AFTERS?**; **SUITE or SWEET**?

**swelled or swollen?** Either word may be used as the past participle of the verb swell. Swelled is the more neutral form; swollen often indicates an undesirable or harmful increase or expansion: • The population has swelled in recent years. • The disaster fund was swelled by a generous contribution from the mayor. • His wrist has swollen to twice its normal size. • The stream was swollen by the melted snow.

The past tense of swell is always swelled: • The population swelled. • His wrist swelled.

Swollen is the usual form of the adjective: • She
swinging

crammed a few more sweets into her swollen pockets. • My ankle is badly swollen. The adjective swollen is largely restricted to the informal American English phrase swollen head, denoting conceit, which is usually replaced by swollen head in British English.

swinging Note the pronunciation and spelling of this word, which means 'severe': • swinging cuts in public expenditure • swinging tax increases. The word is pronounced [swinning]; the -e- distinguishes it from swinging and indicates the softness of the g.

See also SPELLING 3.

• The word derives from Old English swengen 'to beat or fog'.

swipe The verb swipe has acquired a new meaning with the advent of electronic credit and debit cards, etc., describing the action of passing such a card through an electronic reading device: • Let me swipe your card for you. Careful users restrict the word to informal contexts.

swollen see SWELLED or SWOLLEN?

swop see SWAP or SWOP?

swot see SWAT or SWOT?

syllable A syllable is a unit of a word that contains a vowel sound or something that resembles a vowel sound. The words by, tune, and through have one syllable; the words doctor, table, and open have two syllables; the word secretary has three syllables if the a is not sounded and four syllables if the a is sounded.

syllabus The plural of this word, which means 'the subjects studied in a particular course', is usually syllabuses. Syllabi, pronounced [-bə], is the less frequent plural form.

symbol The noun symbol is followed by the preposition in the sense 'an emblem': • An olive branch is a symbol of peace, and by far in the sense 'a sign': • A diagonal cross is the symbol for multiplication.

See also CYMBAL or SYMBOL?

sync see SINK or SYNC?

syndrome Some people object to the frequent use of the noun syndrome in non-medical contexts to denote any set of characteristics, actions, emotions, etc.: • She is suffering from the only-child syndrome.

• in medicine the noun syndrome denotes a group of signs and symptoms that indicate a physical or mental disorder: • Dawn's syndrome.

synecdoche This term, describing a word that is used to refer to something of which it is just a part, is sometimes misspelt. Note particularly the -y- and the -doche ending, and do not be tempted to put an -h- after the first -e- as well. An example of synecdoche is: • I've got some wheels so we can drive over there tonight.

• The word is pronounced [sın'ekdəki].

synergy In technical contexts the noun synergy, pronounced with a soft g sound [sīˈnərē], denotes the combined action and increased effect of two or more drugs, muscles, etc., working together. The introduction of the noun synergy into general usage is disliked by some: • Synergy, as business people know, is bringing several elements together to make a product greater than the parts (Ilwyn Borough Council advertisement). • [of the Cadbury-Schweppes merger] The growth of vending machines has provided the magic synergy which such mergers are always supposed to produce (The Guardian).

• The concept of synergy is sometimes explained in mathematical terms as 2+2=5.

synonymous Note the spelling of this word, particularly the vowel sequence -y-o-y-o.

• The phrase synonymous with means 'being a synonym of', but in general contexts it is frequently used in the sense of 'closely associated with': • The verb 'jump' is synonymous with 'leap'. • Our name is synonymous with excellence. • Left living car is synonymous with the affluent young urbanite lifestyle.

See also ANTONYM.

syphon see SYPHON or SYPHON?

systematic or systemic? The adjective systematic means 'methodical; well-ordered; well-planned': a systematic approach to the problem • You must try to be more systematic. A rare synonym of systematic, the adjective systemic is most frequently found in biological contexts, in the sense of 'affecting or spreading through the whole system, body, plant etc. • a systemic disease • a systemic fungicide.
-t see -ed or -t

table d'hôte On a menu in a restaurant, table d'hôte refers to a meal that consists of set prearranged courses with a limited selection of dishes and served to all guests at a fixed price.
• The expression comes from French and means literally 'host's table'; its anglicized pronunciation is [tābəl dô].
  See also à LA CARTE.

tactics see -ics.

tag question see QUESTIONS.

tail or tale* Tail variously refers to the flexible rear part of an animal or to the end of something: • The horse's tail brushed his face. • The tail of the aircraft was riddled with bullet holes. It should not be confused with tale, meaning 'story'; • a sad tale about doomed love.

take see BRING OR TAKE?

tall see HIGH OR TALL?

tantamount The adjective tantamount is followed by the preposition to: • Her offer was tantamount to bribery.

target The noun target is now most frequently used in its metaphorical meaning of 'an aim or goal'. The verb form is more recent, and is often followed by on or at: • The advertising campaign is to be carefully targeted at the 15–25 age group. • a benefit which is easy to understand, popular, fair, . . . and actually targets those who genuinely need it (The Guardian).
• Although many people object to the use of target as a verb, it has a long history: the Oxford English Dictionary cites an example from 1837.
  Note that the final t is not doubled in front of suffixes: • targeted • targeting.
  Target is often used in expressions such as target date, meaning 'the date set for the completion of work, etc.': • target markets • consumer-targeted material.

tariff This word is sometimes misspelt. Note the single r and the -ff ending.

task This verb is used in business jargon to mean 'assign a job to someone': • Susan was tasked with investigating potential suppliers.

task force A task force is a group of people formed in order to undertake a particular objective, usually of a military nature: • The captain led a task force to blow up the bridge. • A task force was sent to the Falklands.
• The most frequent use refers to subsections of the armed forces dispatched to deal with particular crises. However, it is sometimes used in a civilian context: • A Home Office task force is to investigate the rise in crime.

tasteful or tasty? These two adjectives relate to different senses of the word taste. Tasteful is applied to things that indicate good taste, in the sense of 'aesthetic discrimination'; tasty is applied to things that have good taste, in the sense of 'flavour': • tasteful furnishings • a tasty meal. Careful users maintain the distinction between the two words.
• Tasty also has the slang meaning of 'sexually attractive': • His sister's rather tasty, and is sometimes used to mean 'excellent; notable': • a tasty song • a tasty little villain. Some people object to these extended usages.

tautology Tautology is the avoidable repetition of an idea already expressed in different words: • a new innovation • a brief moment. Many well-established English phrases contain tautologies: • circle round • free gift • join together • all-time record, etc.
• It is not difficult to avoid the cruder tautologies: • a dead corpse • an empty bottle with nothing in it, but many tautologies arise unintentionally from carelessness about the meanings of words. To speak of unlawful murder is tautological because murder means 'unlawful killing', in • She repeated it again, again is redundant as repeat means 'to say
again'. People also speak of • SALT talks • OPEC countries • a PIN number, presumably not realizing that the word following the abbreviation is a repetition of the final word of the abbreviation.

Tautologies are in general to be avoided but can sometimes be used deliberately for emphasis: • a tiny wee mite.

tea see dinner, lunch, tea or supper?

tea or tee? Tea refers to a hot drink or to a light afternoon meal: • Would you like a cup of tea? • Time for tea. It should not be confused with tee, which refers to the small peg on which a golfer places the ball before playing the first shot of a hole: • The ball kept rolling off the tee.

teach see learn or teach?

team or teem? These two words are sometimes confused, being identical in pronunciation. Team is most frequently used as a noun, meaning 'group of people (or animals) who work or play together': • a valuable member of the sales team • the captain of the hockey team • a team of oxen. Teem is a verb, meaning 'pour' or 'bound': • It was teeming with rain. • The village was teeming with tourists.

• The word team is also used as a verb, often followed by up, meaning 'join to make a team': • Michael teamed up with Peter.

technical or technological? Technical means 'having or concerned with special practical knowledge of a scientific or mechanical subject'; technological means 'using science for practical purposes' and is used particularly of modern advances in technological processes: • technical skills • a technical college • a technological breakthrough.

• A second meaning of the word technical is 'marked by a strict interpretation of law or a set of rules': • a technical offence • a technical advantage.

techno- The prefix techno- relates to art, craft, technology, or technical matters. Some people object to its frequent use in the coinage of new words in the sense of 'relating to high technology, especially computers'. Techno- may be used with or without a hyphen: • technophobia • technofreak • techno-politics.

See also hi-tech.

technological see technical or technological?

tee see tea or tee?

tee or teem see team or teem?

tele- The prefix tele-, from a Greek word meaning 'far', is found in such words as television, telephone, telescope, etc. It is increasingly used in the sense of relating to television or 'by telephone': • telebook • telesub, televangelism • teleshopping • telemarketing • teleworking • Telecommuting is the name given to working from home by linking up to your office computer over the telephone line (The Guardian). These neologisms are disliked by some people, despite the fact that most of them retain the original sense of 'far', since a thing transmitted by television or telephone must originate at a distance.

telephone see phone.

televised This word is often spelt incorrectly with a s instead of an s.

• To avoid mistakes remember that the s in television remains unchanged. Televised is one of the verbs ending in -ise that cannot be spelt -ize: see -ize or -ise?

temeraity or timidity? The word temerity is sometimes mistakenly used where timidity is intended, though their meanings are completely different. Temerity means 'audacity or recklessness'; timidity means lacking courage or self-confidence; easily frightened or alarmed'.

• The two words are not exact opposites. The opposite of timidity is courage or confidence, which have positive connotations, whereas temerity has negative ones. It suggests a rash contempt of danger or discomfort, with a lack of reserve that may be interpreted as ill-mannered: • He had the temerity to interrupt the meeting.

temperature Temperature means 'the degree of heat or cold as measured on, for example, a thermometer'. To take someone's temperature is to use a thermometer to determine the person's body heat.

• The word is often used to denote abnormally high body heat or fever: • running a temperature • She's got a temperature, but this is best avoided in writing and formal contexts. A metaphorical use of temperature describes the emotional state of a group of people; the temperature is raised or low according to whether they are agitated or calm.

temporal or temporary? These two words are sometimes confused. Temporal
means 'relating to secular, ordinary, or worldly things; not spiritual': • temporal matters/authority; 'relating to time'; • spatial and temporal connections; and 'relating to the parts of the brain near the temples': • temporal arteritis. Temporary means lasting for only a limited period of time; not permanent: • temporary accommodation • a temporary loss of memory.

- The adjective temporary may be pronounced as a three- or four-syllable word, with the stress on the first syllable: [tempˈrɪəri] or [tempˈræri]. The four-syllable pronunciation is preferred by some careful users. The pronunciation [tempˌræri], omitting the [ɪ]-sound, is widely regarded as careless or incorrect.

The adverb temporarily should be stressed on the first syllable in British English; the pronunciation [tempˈræri] is restricted to American English.

temporize see extemporize or temporize?
tense The tense of a verb is a set of forms expressing distinctions of time. Some modern grammarians say that fundamentally there are only two real tenses in English, the present: • It is hot today, and the past: • It was cloudy yesterday. The future is simply formed by the addition of will or shall, etc.: • It will be fine tomorrow, and all other changes of tense are marked by using be, have, or both combined, with the past or present participle of the verb: • She is dancing. • He was talking. • I'll be thinking of you. • They had ridden for three days. • I shall have finished it by then. • They had slept until noon. • He had been praying. • She has been working. • They will have been travelling all day.

- The tense system becomes more complicated when there is more than one verb in a sentence. In such sentences there is a main clause, containing the most important verb, and a subordinate clause or clauses containing the other verb(s): • I thought that I knew him. Here the main clause I thought is in the past tense, and the subordinate clause that I knew him follows the lead of the main clause and is in the same tense. This is by no means always the case, for it is quite possible for the clauses to refer to different times: • I believe I met him last week. When the main clause is in the future, the verb of the subordinate clause is usually in the present: • I will look him up when I go to London. When the main clause is in the past but the subordinate clause expresses some permanent fact, then that clause can be in the present: • She had learnt that Paris is a capital city. In sentences referring to the future as viewed from the past, the subordinate verb usually changes to the past tense: • I hope they will succeed becomes I hoped they would succeed.

The present tense is not used solely in expressions of events in the present. It is frequently used to express the future: • I leave on Thursday. • The President speaks to the nation tonight. The present is also habitually used in newspaper headlines to describe past events: • Van makes U-turn into path of coach (The Times).

The verb form that is generally used for expressing recent events or actions is the present perfect, which is formed by adding have to the past participle of a verb: • You've already told me. • He's just seen his mother. • Has she turned up yet? In informal American English the simple past tense is used in such sentences: • You already told me. • He just saw his mother. • Did she turn up yet? and this form is also beginning to be used in British English.

See also PARTICIPLES; SEQUENCE OF TENSES: SUBJUNCTIVE; VERBS.
terminal or terminus? Used as a noun meaning 'end or finishing point' these words are often synonymous. Both can mean the finishing point of a transport line, but in British terminal is used for airlines, terminus for railways, while either can be used for bus routes. Terminal as an adjective can mean 'of, at, the end' or 'leading to death': • a terminal illness.

- Other meanings of terminal as a noun include: • a device on a wire or battery for an electrical connection, and 'an instrument through which a user can communicate with a computer'.
terminate Terminate, meaning 'bring to an end, form the ending of, close', is increasingly used in the context of ending employment. From speaking of terminating someone's contract, etc., some people have gone on to use terminated as a synonym for dismissed: • The workers were terminated when profits fell.

- Terminate is also used of buses and trains to mean 'stop at a particular place and go no further': • This train terminates here. An extension of its sense 'bring to an end' has resulted in its adoption as a euphemism for killing someone: • Orders have gone out for the general to be terminated.

Another popular use relates to ending pregnancies. A termination is synonymous with an abortion, although largely confined to medical contexts and not the preferred term in popular use.
Terminated, with the addition of with or in, is a fashionable alternative to resulted in in sports commentaries: • The match terminated in a draw.

**terminus** see **TERMINAL OR TERMINUS**?

terrible or terrific? Terrible can be used as a general term of disapproval or can mean ‘very bad’ or ‘causing distress’: • a terrible singer • a terrible accident • a terrible sight.

Terrific, on the other hand, expresses approval: • Chartres has a terrific cathedral.

Both can mean ‘unusually great’: • There’s a terrific/terrible amount of paperwork here.

* The adverbs terribly and terrifically may be used as intensifiers to express either approval or disapproval: • a terribly/terifically dull lecture • a terribly/terifically good book.

While both words derive from terror, they are now far removed from any suggestion of fear. Both should be restricted to informal contexts.

**tête-à-tête** This compound, meaning ‘intimate conversation between two people’, is of French origin. Note the accents, which should not be omitted when the term is used in English texts.

* The anglicized pronunciation is [tayta-tay].

text Since the advent of **TEXT MESSAGING**, the word text has been increasingly used as a verb to describe the process of sending keyed text from one mobile telephone or pager to another: • Please text the details to me. Some people dislike this appropriation of the noun as a verb but it is now generally accepted as a standard form.

**text messaging** The introduction of the Short Message Service (SMS) in the 1990s, enabling the transmission of keyed messages by mobile telephone or pager (**text messaging**), has led to the development of an abbreviated form of **NETSPEAK**. The small screen size on which messages appear means that extensive use is made of acronyms and other abbreviations, often based on the sound of individual letters and numbers, which are not always immediately comprehensible. For a selection of these see the table below.

| @TEOTD | at the end of the day |
| 10Q    | thank you |
| 10TD   | one of these days |
| 2Day   | today |
| 4eva   | for ever |

than **Than** is used to link two halves of comparisons or contrasts: • *Jack is taller than Jill. • I am older now than I was at that time.

* Care must be taken with pronouns following than. The general rule is to remember the missing verb: • *You are older than I am*. If there is no obvious implied verb the object form follows: • *Rather you than me!* However, the form that is considered correct by careful users sometimes sounds stilted: • *She runs faster than he is correct, but she runs faster than him* is more frequently used. • *She runs faster than he does* is both correct and natural-sounding.

Note that it is incorrect to follow than with what: • *He is cleverer than not what* I am.

thankfully As an adverb from thank, thankfully means ‘in a thankful, relieved, or grateful way’: • *They received the good news thankfully*. It is also used to mean ‘it is a matter of relief that’: • *Thankfully, he has survived the operation.*

* Many people dislike the second use of thankfully, although it is not as widely objected to as the similar use of **HOPEFULLY**. It can also occasionally
lead to such ambiguous statements as: • Thank-
fully, she went to church on Sunday.

thank you Thank you, thanks, many thanks,
etc., are expressions of gratitude: • Thank
you for a lovely evening. They are also used
in acceptance: • 'Have a sweet.' Thanks, I
will', as a polite refusal in conjunction with
no: • 'Have a sweet.' No, thanks', in a firm
and less polite refusal: • I can manage
without your advice, thank you very much,
and to show pleasure: • Now David's got a
new job, we're doing very nicely, thank you
very much.

Thanks can indicate responsibility or blame: •
Thanks to your coaching, I passed my exam. •
Thanks to their incompetence, we lost the con-
tract. Thank heavens, thank goodness, and thank
God are general expressions of relief: • Thank
heavens you're all right. • Peace has been de-
clared.' Thank goodness'

Thank you is sometimes spelt as one word or
hyphenated, when it is used as a noun or attribu-
tively: • We said our thank yous and left. • a thank-
you letter.

that That is used as a conjunction or
relative pronoun to introduce various types of
clause, and in some cases can be omitted,
both in written and spoken English. As a
conjunction it can usually be omitted: • I'm
sure that you're lying. It cannot be left out
when used with a noun: • the fact that grass
is green, or with certain verbs, usually of a
formal nature, for example assert, contend.
It must not be left out when its omission
could lead to ambiguity: • I said last week
you were wrong might mean either 'I said
that last week you were wrong' or 'I said
last week that you were wrong'.

• Used as a relative pronoun that can be omitted
when it is the subject: • the thing that I love, but not
when it is the object: • the thing that upsets me.
The use of that as an adverb: • He's not that fat
is best avoided in formal contexts.

that or this? The difference between the
pronouns that and this, referring to objects
or people, is one of distance. That is further
away from the speaker than this: • Give me
that. • Take this.

• When the pronouns represent abstract con-
cepts, that traditionally refers to something in
the past (or something previously mentioned),
whereas this refers to something in the future
(or something about to be mentioned): • This is
what I want you to do. • That is what I expected
you to do. The use of this in place of that in such
circumstances may be ambiguous and is best avoided.

that or which? Whether to use that or
which depends on whether it appears in a
restrictive or non-restrictive clause. That
and which are both used in restrictive (or defining) clauses: • the school that which they
may go to. Note that a restrictive clause is not
preceded by a comma. In non-restrictive
(or non-defining) clauses, those conveying
parenthetical or incidental information,
only which can be used: • The programme,
which was broadcast by the BBC, caused
much controversy. Non-restrictive clauses
are always preceded by a comma and,
unless at the end of a sentence, followed
by one. On the use of that or whom, see
WHO.

• Some people dislike the use of which in restric-
tive clauses, maintaining that only that can be
used. However, the usage described above is
widespread and generally accepted. Which is also use-
ful to relieve a sentence that already has several
thats: • His Ford Capri. He remembered that that
was the car which [not that] had run out of petrol
on the M1.

See also COMMA 3: RESTRICTIVE CLAUSE.

the The is the most frequently used word
in the English language. Its pronunciation
is usually a straightforward matter. Before
consonants it is pronounced [ðeɪ]; before
vowels or an unaspirated h it is pronounced
[dh]. The use of [ðeɪ] before consonants
has become frequent in recent years,
particulariy by broadcasters, but it is disliked by
many people.

• One use of the is to single out one of a class as
the best or most significant of a class: • is that the
Michael Jackson? • It's the place to go for curvy.
In these cases the is emphasized and pronounced
[dh].

theft see BURGLE, ROB or STEAL?

their, there or they're? These three
words are sometimes confused. Their
means 'of them or belonging to them'; •
their house. There means 'in or to that place':
• over there. They're is a contraction of they
are: • They're/They're always late.

• Another frequent mistake is the wrong spelling
of theirs as their's. The correct usage is as in: • The
car was theirs.

See also THEY.
them or their? see -ING FORMS.

**theme park** A theme park is an amusement park in which the displays and entertainments are organized around one particular idea or group of ideas, e.g. space travel or the Wild West.

**themselves** The reflexive pronoun *themselves* is unacceptable to careful users, being associated with the controversial singular usage of *they, them, their, etc.* (see *THEY*). • Somebody has been helping himself to my whisky.

• Walking through Pilsen, the casual observer might easily think himself back in 1945 (The Times, cited in English Today).

**thence** Thence is a formal and almost archaic word with three meanings: ‘from there, from that place’; • We drove to York and thence to Scotland; ‘from that premise, or for that reason’; • She proved that x was an even number and thence that it must be 42; and ‘from that time’; • His wife died ten years ago and thence he has become a recluse.

As from is contained in the meaning of thence it is incorrect to say from thence (see HENCE WHENCE).

Thence is sometimes mistakenly used to mean ‘to there’, instead of the even more archaic thither.

**there** see THEIR, THERE OR THEY'RE?

**there are** see THERE IS OR THERE ARE?

**thencefore** Therefore means ‘for that reason, consequently, as this proves’: • I dislike worms; therefore I avoid digging the garden. • Scotland is part of Great Britain; therefore the Scots are British.

• Therefore normally appears at the beginning of a clause and is not followed by a comma, if it appears parenthetically within a clause it has a comma before and after: • It appears, therefore, that he must be guilty.

Note that therefore and **thus** are not always synonymous: • She spoke thus (i.e. in such a way).

**there is** or **there are**? Normally, there is should precede a singular noun, and there are a plural: • There is a black car outside. • There are three bottles on the table. However, there is is widely used in various expressions where there are is formally correct.

• These include situations where the plural noun is regarded as a single unit: • There is three tons of coal here; where the first of a list of nouns is singular: • There is a rabbit, two gerbils, and some

**white mice**; where two nouns are regarded as a single entity: • There is fish and chips for supper, and where one is considering a situation in its entirety: • There is my job and career prospects at stake.

The use of the contraction there’s followed by a plural is almost universal in informal speech: • There’s two good films showing, although unacceptable in formal speech and writing.

they They, them, their, etc., are increasingly being used to refer to singular entities: • Anyone can apply if they have the qualifications.

• Such use, in conjunction with anyone, someone, no one, everyone, is well-established and in formations such as: • No one's seen John, have they?

is becoming generally acceptable. However, many careful users object to such phrases as a person on their own. The use of he and his has a male bias unacceptable to many, while he or she or his or her often sounds clumsy or stilted. Probably the best solution is to make the noun plural to agree with they or their: • people on their own.

See also HE OR SHE, THEMSELF.

**they're** see THEIR, THERE OR THEY'RE?

**third** or **thirdly**? see FIRST OR FIRSTLY?

**third-generation** This adjectival phrase, denoting something that belongs to a third developmental stage, is particularly associated with computer technology, but has also come to be applied to mobile telephones: • These third-generation phones offer vast new commercial possibilities.

**third world** see DEVELOPMENT.

**thirst** The verb thirst is followed by the preposition for or after: • They thirsted for [or after] revenge.

**this** Careful users avoid using *this* as an intensifier before a noun in the place of such definite articles as a, an, the, etc.: • Then this bloke came along and this policeman told him to keep his distance.

See also NEXT OR THIS?, THAT OR THIS?

**thoroughfare** The noun thoroughfare, meaning ‘way through’, is sometimes misspelt and/or mispronounced, the most frequent error being the substitution of through- for thorough-.

**though** see ALTHOUGH or THOUGH?

**thrash** or **thresh**? The verb thrash means
'flog or beat with repeated blows' or 'defeat': • As a child, he was frequently thrashed by his father. • We thrashed the opposition. Thrash means 'separate seeds of cereal from husks by beating'.

• Thrash, usually with about, can also mean 'move violently': • He thrashed his arms about like a windmill, and is used in the idiomatic phrasal verb thrash out meaning 'discuss in detail until a solution is found': • Let's thrash out this problem together.

The two words are occasionally confused, partly because thresh, with the meaning given above, is sometimes spelt thrash.

threshold Note that there is only one h in the middle of this word, unlike in the word withhold.

• Threshold may be pronounced either [thresh-hold] or [threshhold].

threw or through? Threw is the past participle of the verb throw: • She threw the ball up in the air. It should not be confused with through, which means 'across', 'among', or 'past': • He ran through the grass. • They fought their way through the mob.

thus The slightly formal adverb thus means 'in such a manner, in the way indicated, consequently': • His father died in a hunting accident and thus became a baron.

• Thus far means 'to this extent, up to now': • Thus far we have succeeded. • Go thus far but no further.

The word thusly, sometimes used in American English, is unacceptable in written or spoken British English.

See also THEREFORE.

tide or tied? Tide refers to the ebb and flow of the sea or a movement of something in a particular direction: • The tide rolled in until the rock was covered. • The tide of opinion appears to be flowing against the prime minister. It should not be confused with tied, the past tense and past participle of the verb tie: • He tied his bootlace.

till or until? Both words mean 'up to the time that, up to as far as': • I will work until I drop. • Carry on till you reach the traffic lights.

• They are interchangeable although until is slightly more formal and till is more likely to be used in speech. Until is usually more appropriate as the first word of a sentence: • Until they go we shall have no peace.

Till is not an abbreviation of until so 'till and 'til are incorrect.

timidity see TEMERITY or TIMIDITY?

tire or tyre? The rubber outer part of a wheel is known as a tire in American English and as a tyre in British English. Tire can also mean 'grow weary' or 'lose interest': • He never tire of being with me. • They seem to tire of cricket very quickly.

titillate or titivate? Literally, titillate means the same as tickle but it is almost always used figuratively in the sense of 'stimulate or arouse pleasantly': • Her interest titillated his vanity. Titivate is occasionally confused with titillate, but its meaning is 'tardy or smarten up': • I must titivate myself for the party.

• Titillate is sometimes used to mean 'excite mild sexual pleasure' and in modern usage it often has negative connotations of superficiality or self-indulgence: • Readers of sensationalist tabloids are titillated by reports of sexual offences.

Note the spelling of titillate, especially the -t- and -l- (unlike the single -v- of titivate).

titles Generally the titles of literary works, musical works, works of art, films, etc., are set in italics or, in handwriting and typescript, underlined: • I saw King Lear last night. • She sang the title role in Carmen. • Constable's Flatford Mill.

• The Bible and the names of its individual books are not set in italics, and neither are the Talmud, the Torah, or the Koran.

Titles of newspapers and periodicals are set in italics. Normally the definite article before the name is not italicized: • the Daily Mail, The Times and The Economist are exceptions.

The titles of long poems are usually set in italics, but short ones in inverted commas: • Keats's Endymion • Keats's 'To Autumn'.

See also MS, MRS or MISS?

to or too? These two spellings are sometimes confused. To is used with the infinitive and as a preposition; too is an adverb, meaning 'also' or 'excessively': • to go home • Give it to me. • too much noise • Mary came too.

tobacconist This word, for a person or shop that sells tobacco, cigarettes, cigars,
together with

etc., is sometimes misspelt. Like *tobacco*, there is a single *-b* and *-cc*; note also the single *-m*.

together with Together with means 'in addition to': • The chairman of the company, together with three of the directors, has resigned. Note that the verb *has* agrees with the singular noun *chairman*: the phrase introduced by *together with* does not form part of the subject of the sentence.
• If *together with* is replaced by *and*, the verb becomes plural: • The chairman of the company and three of the directors have resigned.

toilet, lavatory, loo or bathroom? Toilet, lavatory, and *loo* are virtually interchangeable in British English: • I need to go to the toilet. • We're out of lavatory paper. • Where's the loo? *Bathroom* is used in American English as a synonym for *toilet*, but in Britain its main meaning is a room containing a bath but not necessarily a toilet.
• *Toilet* is probably the most widely used term in British English, although *loo* is very commonly used in all but the most formal situations.

Toilets are usually used on signs in public places.

The use of *toilet* or *lavatory* is often considered a class marker in Britain. Upper- and middle-class people tend to use *lavatory*, while lower-middle and working-class people use *toilet* and regard *lavatory* as affected or impolite. *Loo* is classless.

tolerance or toleration? Both these words are nouns from *tolerate*, but *tolerance* is 'the capacity to tolerate', while *toleration* is 'the act of tolerating': • *His tolerance is unlimited.*
• *Her toleration of his habits demonstrates her good nature.*

*Tolerance* is generally used with reference to the beliefs of others, although in the context of official government policy, *toleration* is used: • *religious toleration.*

*Tolerance* has several technical meanings in mathematics, statistics, physics, and medicine: an accepted deviation from a standard measurement; the ability of substances to endure heat, stress, etc., without being damaged; the capacity of a person's body to withstand harmful substances, etc.

ton, tonne or tun? *Ton* and *tonne* are both large units of weight. In Britain, a *ton* (or *long ton*) is equal to 2240 pounds. In the USA, a *ton* (or *short ton*) is 2000 pounds. A *tonne* (or *metric ton*) is equal to 1000 kilograms. A *tun* is a large beer cask or a unit of liquid capacity, especially a unit of 210 gallons.
• *Ton, tonne, and tun* are all pronounced the same [*tun*].

too see *too* or *to*?
torpor This word, meaning 'inactive condition', is sometimes misspelt. Note the final *-or*, as in *stupor*, rather than *-our*.

tortuous or torturous? *Tortuous* means 'twisting; winding' and, figuratively, 'complex, devious, or overelaborate': • a *tortuous road* • a *tortuous policy*. *Tortuous* comes from *torture* and means 'inflicting torture; agonizing or painful': • a *torturous illness*.
• *Tortuous* is sometimes used to mean 'complicated' or 'twisted', but careful users restrict it to the use suggesting physical or mental pain. The context often leads to confusion: • a *tortuous decision* might mean a complex one or might be a mistake for a *tortuous decision* – one that is painful to make.

total Total is used as a noun: • The total was 115, a verb: • *Profit this year total one million pounds*, and an intensifying adjective suggesting completeness: • a *total failure* • a *total stranger*. As a verb, it is also used (chiefly in American English) as a slang term meaning 'wreck' or 'destroy utterly': • *He has totalled the car.*
• Some people dislike the use of *total* as an intensifying adjective synonymous with utter or complete, maintaining that the word should be used only when there is a sense of parts being added to produce a whole as in: • the total cost.

Another disputed use is where the noun already suggests total: some people think total is redundant in phrases like *total annihilation* or the *sum total*.

tour de force The French expression tour de force is used to refer to a performance or achievement that shows great skill, strength, etc.: • *a theatrical tour de force.*
• The expression is sometimes spelt with hyphens, tour-de-force. Its plural is *tours de force*. The singular and plural are both pronounced [toor du fors].

tourniquet This word, meaning 'a bandage tied tightly round an arm or leg to stop bleeding', may be pronounced [torni-kay] or [tornikay] in British English.
• In American English the final syllable is pronounced [tuh].
toward or towards? In British English, toward is a rare adjective meaning 'afoot', 'imminent', or 'favourable' or a variant of towards, the usual form of the preposition meaning 'in the direction of' or 'with regard to': • They walked towards the hotel. • What are his feelings towards her? • The preposition toward is more frequently used in American English.

See also -WARD or -WARDS?

The adjective toward's pronounced [təˈwɔːrd]; the preposition toward's is pronounced ['təwərd].

town see CITY or TOWN?

town house A town house suggests an urban terraced house, usually with three or more storeys. However, when one speaks of someone's town house one can also mean a house in town belonging to a rich person whose main residence is in the country: • They used their town house for Veronica's ball.

track record The phrase track record, meaning 'record of past performance', is frequently used as an unnecessary extension of the word record or synonym for 'experience', especially in job advertisements: • a sound track record in R&D • a successful track record in sales and marketing. Care should be taken to avoid overusing this expression.

trade names Trade names are names given to articles by their manufacturers. Some have unofficially become treated as quasi-generic names for articles of their kind, although manufacturers guard their protected legal status jealously • Hoover • Biro.

• All nouns that are actually trade names should be spelt with an initial capital letter, although this is frequently overlooked, as in: Please use a black fountain pen or biro. She wore a crombeline dress. When the noun has given rise to a verb it is frequently found spelt with a lower-case initial letter, though this is technically incorrect: • He hoovered the carpet.

trade union or trades union? The generally accepted singular noun is trade union, with the plural trade unions. • There is no good grammatical reason for the use of trades union or trades unions, although both are frequently used. However, the official title of the TUC, the central association of British trade unions, is the Trades Union Congress, and this title should be used when referring to that organization.

trafficker This word is sometimes misspelt. The word traffic adds a k before the suffixes -er, -ed, and -ing: • illegal arms trafficking.

See also SPIELING.

trait This word may be pronounced [træit] or [traɪt], although careful users prefer the first pronunciation.

• In American English [traɪt] is standard.

tranche The noun tranche is best avoided where section, group, portion, or instalment would be adequate or more appropriate: • a tranche of the population • payable in three tranches.

• Of French origin, the word tranche entered the English language via the terminology of the Stock Market, where it means 'a block of bonds or government stock'.

tranquillity This word, meaning 'peaceful state': • the perfect tranquillity of the lake, is often misspelt. Note the -ll- and the final single t.

transformation, transfiguration, transmigration or transmutation? Transformation describes a fundamental change in someone or something: • She has undergone a transfiguration in recent months. • The country is in the midst of a dramatic economic transformation. • Transfiguration is virtually synonymous with transformation but is used in more literary contexts: 'It was less a reform than a transfiguration. The former curves of sensuousness were now modulated to lines of devotional passion' (Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles). In the New Testament, the transfiguration of Jesus Christ is 'the revelation of the glory of Jesus Christ, shortly before his death, at which his disciples caught sight of him in his full majesty' (NIV Thematic Study Bible). Transmigration is quite distinct in meaning, variously denoting the movement of people from one place to another or to the journey of the soul from one body to another at death: • The transmigration of rebel Kurds. • She did not believe in the transmigration of souls. Transmutation signifies a change in something from one state to another: • the transmutation of liquid to gas.
transient or transitory? Both words mean 'short-lived, lasting only a brief time': • It is just a transient/transitory phase.

The words are virtually interchangeable but have a slightly different feel about them. Transient often suggests passing by quickly, perhaps because of rapid movement from place to place; • transient summer visitors. Transitory often carries a suggestion of regret about the way desirable things change or disappear: • the transitory nature of human love.

Transient is sometimes used as a noun to denote a person who stays for only a short time in any one place.

transitive see verbs.

translate or transliterate? To translate is to express in a different language; to transliterate is to write or print using a different alphabet. The Greek word petra, for example, may be transliterated as petra and translated into English as 'rock'. The two verbs should not be confused.

transmigration, transmutation see transformation, transfiguration, transmigration or transmutation?

transparent This word has various pronunciations, all of which are acceptable. The most frequent in contemporary usage is [trə'peɪsənt] but the pronunciations [trə'peɪrənt] and [trə'peɪrənt] are also heard. The -s- is sometimes pronounced with a zsound.

transpire Transpire means 'become known; come to light': • It later transpired that the President had known of the plan all along. It is also widely used to mean 'happen or occur': • I will let you know what transpires. This second use is disliked by many careful users, although it has a well-established history.

• Transpire is also sometimes used to mean 'turn out or prove to be': • He transpired to be her cousin, and even 'arrive or turn up': • Subsequently dozens of letters transpired. Both such uses are incorrect.

transport or transportation? Transport is used in British English both for the system and means of conveying: • public transport • I have my own transport. In American English transportation is often used: • the fastest form of transportation • The goods were packed ready for transportation, and this usage is now sometimes found in British English.

• Transportation is used in both British and American English to mean 'the banishment of convicts': • The sentence was transportation to Australia. Transport is also used in formal English to mean 'the state of being carried away by emotion': • a transport of joy.

transverse or traverse? Transverse is an adjective meaning 'lying or set across; at right angles': • a transverse section. Traverse is a verb meaning 'cross; go across' or a noun meaning 'way or path across': • The river traverses two counties. • The traverse of this mountain is dangerous to inexperienced climbers.

traumatic Traumatic is the adjective from trauma, which means 'a wound or injury' and it is still used in this sense in medical contexts: • traumatic fever. However its main use is with the figurative meaning of 'causing great and deeply disturbing emotional shock': • a traumatic bereavement • the traumatic effects of divorce • the traumatic experience of a concentration camp.

• Both traumatic and trauma have become very much overworked and are often used for cases of mild distress or annoyance: • I spent a traumatic evening filling in my tax return. • the trauma of moving house.

The usual pronunciation of trauma is [traʊmə]; the pronunciation [traʊməl] is used less frequently.

travel This word is sometimes misspelt. In British English the final l is doubled before the suffixes -ed, -ing, and -er: • well-travelled • travelling fast along the motorway • commercial travellers.

• American English retains the single l: • traveled • traveler • travelling.

See also spelling.

transverse see transverse or traverse?

treble or triple? Both words can be used as a noun, verb, and adjective and are virtually interchangeable in meaning. However, treble is preferred by many careful users when the meaning is 'three times as great': • treble the sum, and triple when the meaning is 'consisting of three parts': • a triple jump.

• The words have distinctly different meanings in the context of music. Treble refers to a high-pitched voice or instrument, or a singer who per-
forms at this pitch, whereas triple is used of rhythm: • a treble recorder • triple time.

**tremble** The verb tremble is followed by the preposition at in the sense 'respond to something frightening': • I trembled at the thought, and with in the sense 'show fear, excitement, etc.': • The children were trembling with fear.

**tremor** This word, meaning 'shaking or quivering action': • earth tremors, is sometimes misspelt. Note the ending -or, not -our.

**triage** This word, describing the practice of treating sick or injured people in order according to the seriousness of their condition, is often misspelt. Note particularly the -age ending.

• The word is pronounced [triːeɪdʒ] or [triəˈveɪdʒ].

**tribe** Tribe, in its sense of 'people' or 'social group', is often avoided by careful users because of its negative connotations, which imply that the group in question is primitive and uncivilized: • The local tribe were quickly subdued by the colonists.

• Use of tribe in a figurative sense, to describe a family gathering or group of other people is best restricted to informal contexts: • Here comes my sister with all her tribe.

**trillion** see **billion**.

**triple** see **triple** or **triumphant**?

**triumph** or **triumphant**? These adjectives are often confused. Triumphal is connected with the celebration of a victory, usually of a military nature: • triumphal arch • A triumphal march was played as the victorious army paraded through the streets. Triumphant means 'victorious, exulting or rejoicing in success': • The team were triumphant. • Having succeeded in her task, she returned with a triumphant smile.

• Triumphant is the more frequently used word, triumphal being restricted to narrower, more formal contexts.

**trivia** Trivia means 'matters of very minor importance': • the trivia of village gossip • Why waste hours fussing over the trivia of everyday life?

• The word is actually a plural, so careful users would not say for example: • Such trivia is beneath my notice. However, Such trivia are beneath my notice has a stilted and unnatural sound, so most users would substitute such phrases as: • trivial matters • trivial issues • trivial things for trivia in the preceding example.

**troop or troupe?** These words are sometimes confused. A troop is a military unit or group of people or things: • troops of soldiers • a Scout troop. Troop is also used as a verb in informal English to mean 'move as a large group': • Then they all trooped off home. A troupe is a group of actors or performers: • a troupe of travelling acrobats.

• The words troop and troupe are also sometimes confused. A troop is a cavalry soldier, especially a private, and in American and Australian English a mounted policeman: • swear like a trouper means 'swear a lot'. A trouper is a member of a troupe of dancers, singers, etc.

**trooping the colour** To troop the colour is to parade the flag of a regiment ceremonially along the ranks of soldiers of that regiment: • trooping the colour • the trooping of the colour. Written with capital initials, the phrase Trooping the Colour refers to the annual parade in London, usually attended by the Queen, the Prime Minister, and other dignitaries: • We went to watch the ceremony of Trooping the Colour.

• Since the ceremony is officially called Trooping the Colour, some people object to the phrase the Trooping of the Colour: • We went to watch the Trooping of the Colour. However, this example reads awkwardly without the of (or the first the): • We went to watch (the) Trooping the Colour. A possible solution is to use Trooping the Colour adjectively: • We went to watch the Trooping the Colour ceremony.

**troupe** see **troop or troupe**?

**truculent** This adjective, which means 'sullenly or defiantly aggressive', is sometimes misspelt. Note the -auc- and the -ent ending. The correct pronunciation is [trəkˈvjuːlənt].

**truisms** The narrower meaning of truisms is 'a statement of self-evident truth, one containing superfluous repetition of an idea': • it is a truism to speak of single bachelors. The word is more widely used to mean 'a statement of a fact that is too obvious to be thought worth stating': • the truisms that stars are only visible at night.

• Truisms is sometimes used as though it were a synonym for fact or truth in such phrases as: • the
truisms that heterosexuals can contract AIDS, but such use is widely regarded as unacceptable.

**truly** The adverb truly is sometimes misspelt. Note that the final -e of true is dropped when the adverbial suffix -ly is added.

**try and** or **try to**? The two expressions are virtually interchangeable: • Try and catch me! • Try to tell the truth. Try and is colloquial and is very frequently used; it is unacceptable only in formal written English.

• Note that try to sounds better in a negative context: • She didn't even try to be polite and only try to can be used in the past tense: • They tried to break into the house.

**tsar** or **czar**? This word, the title of any of the former Russian emperors, is spelt tsar, czar, or, rarely, tzar. It is pronounced [zah].

• Many users prefer the spelling tsar, because it more accurately reflects the Russian word as written in the Cyrillic script. The spelling czar shows the origin of the word from the Gothic kaisar, and ultimately the Latin Caesar.

The word has been revived in recent years as an informal title for a person who has been appointed head of an official committee or other body, but in this sense it is usually spelt czar: • He is the government's new drugs czar.

**tun** see **TON, TONNE or TUN**?

**tunnel** This word is sometimes misspelt. In British English the final l is doubled before the suffixes -ed, -ing, and -er: • They tunneled under the hill.

• American English retains the single l:隧道. See also **SPELLING 1**.

**turbid, turbulent or turgid**? The adjective turbid, used in formal contexts, is sometimes confused with turbulent or turgid. Turbid means 'opaque; cloudy; muddy; dense': • a turbid pool. The adjective turbulent means 'in a state of agitated movement or confusion': • turbulent sea: • a politically turbulent period of history. The adjective turgid means 'swollen' or 'distended': • The turgid river had overflowed its banks.

• Both turbid and turgid may be applied in formal and figurative contexts to linguistic or literary style. Turbid meaning 'confused' and turgid 'bombastic': • turbid/turgid prose.

**turbo-** The prefix turbo- is applied to a machine that is driven by a turbine: • turbofan • turbojet. Its association with turbocharged cars, in which performance is improved by the use of a turbine, sometimes leads to a mistaken interpretation and application of the prefix in the sense of 'fast' or 'powerful': • a turbo model of a computer. This extension of usage is best avoided.

**turbulent, turgid** see **TURBID, TURBULENT or TURGID**?

**turquoise** The name of this greenish-blue mineral has various pronunciations. The most frequent in contemporary usage is [tərkwaɪz], but [tɜːrkwɔɪz], [tərkwɔɪz], and [tərkwɔɪz] are also heard.

**twelfth** Careful users avoid dropping the f in the pronunciation of this word [twelθ]. The word is, however, frequently pronounced without the f.

**type** of see **KIND OF**.

**tyre** see **TIRE or TYRE**?
**Uber** This German prefix, meaning 'over', has been absorbed into English in recent years to describe a person who ranks above their peers in a particular field: *an Uberchef* • *an Ubermodel*. As a vogue term, it is best restricted to informal contexts.

- The word is sometimes rendered in its original German form, with an umlaut, as über: • There’s a certain irony in this story: a sceptic and über-rationalist finding a cure for his illness in a mysterious hatchet-patch of Chinese herbs (The Guardian).

**Ultimate** *Ultimate* is used mainly as an adjective meaning 'last, final, eventual': • *the ultimate goal*, or 'fundamental': • *ultimate truths*. As a noun it has traditionally simply meant 'something ultimate' or 'the extreme': • *the ultimate in wickedness*. This last use is increasingly being extended, particularly in advertising and journalism, to mean 'the best possible; the most modern or advanced thing': • *the ultimate in swimming pools* • *the ultimate in high technology*.

- This vogue use, disliked by some, has some similarity with the phrase the last word.

**Ultra** *Ultra* is an adjective meaning 'going beyond' or 'extreme' and is also used as a prefix with other words, either with or without a hyphen. In the sense of 'extremely' it is used in such words as: • *ultramodern* • *ultra-radical*.

- In the sense of 'beyond the range of' it is used in: • ultrasonic • ultramicroscopic. UHF stands for ultrahigh-frequency.

**Umbilical** This word may be stressed on the second syllable [uṃbɪˈlɪkl] or on the third [uṃˈbɪkəl].

**Umpire** see *Referee* or *Umpire*?

**Un-** see *Non-*.  

**Unanimous** *Unanimous* means 'of one mind; in complete agreement': • *The committee reached a unanimous decision*. It can only be used when several people all agree about something, and cannot be used as a synonym for *wholehearted* or *enthusiastic* as in: • *Many of the group were prepared to give the project their unanimous backing*.

- When a vote is taken someone can only be said to have been *elected unanimously*, or a motion *passed unanimously*, if every person present voted in favour. If there are any abstentions the motion is said to be passed *nem con*, which is an abbreviation of the Latin *nemini contradixit*, 'no one contradicting'.

**Unaware or unawares?** *Unaware* is an adjective meaning 'not aware; not knowing about; not having noticed': • *I was unaware that you were coming*. • *He seemed unaware of the reaction he was causing*. It is occasionally used as an adverb, but the usual adverb is *unawares*, meaning 'unexpectedly, without warning', often in *caught unawares* or *taken unawares*: • *The landslide caught the villagers unawares*.

- *Unaware* is often followed by of or that but *unawares* cannot precede another word in that way.

**Uncertain** The adjective *uncertain* is followed by the preposition of or about: • *She was uncertain of [or about] the terms of the contract*.

**Unconscious** see *Subconscious* or *Unconscious?*

**Under** see *Below, Beneath, Under* or *Underneath?*

**Underfoot or underfoot?** This term should be spelt as one word, not as two separate words: • *It was rather wet underfoot*.

**Underhand or underhanded?** Both *underhand* and *underhanded* are used as adjectives to mean 'sly, marked by dishonesty, trickery, and deception': • *They used the most underhand/underhanded methods in their campaign*.

- Both words can be used in the context of some
underlay

sports, meaning 'with the hand below the shoulder or elbow': • underhand shooting • aiming underhanded. Underhanded is also occasionally used to mean 'short of the required number of workers'.

underlay or underlie? Both verbs are used transitively; underlay has the past tense and past participle underlaid; underlie has the past tense underlay and the past participle underlain. Underlay means 'cover the bottommost part of': • to underlay the carpet with felt. Underlie is used more frequently and means 'form the cause or basis of': • This trend has underlain many of the changes in present-day society; it is most often used in the adjectival form underlying: • the underlying reasons for the conflict.

ununderneath see below, beneath, under or underneath!

underprivileged Underprivileged has become a fashionable adjective to use in connection with those lacking the standard of income and opportunities enjoyed by other members of the society in which they live: • She started a clinic for underprivileged children. • Many young criminals come from underprivileged backgrounds. It is used as a noun as well as an adjective: • His concern for the underprivileged drew him towards social work as a career.
• Its real meaning is not 'lacking in privileges' but rather, 'lacking in rights; disadvantaged' or at least lacking in those social and economic rights considered to be fundamental in Western developed society.

undertone see overtone or undertone?

underway or under way? Careful users prefer to write this expression, meaning 'moving in progress', as two words: • Preparations for the new project are now well underway. The one exception to this is when it appears as an adjective preceding a noun: • The aircraft rendezvoused for underway fuelling. • the then underway project. The expression is, however, increasingly being spelt as one word in all contexts.
• The spelling underway is wrong. This spelling probably arises from confusion with the nautical expression weigh anchor, meaning 'raise anchor'.

undoubtedly Undoubtedly, no doubt, doubtless, without (a) doubt are all adverbs expressing that something is not disputed. However, undoubtedly and without a doubt express that idea much more positively and strongly than the other expressions: • She is undoubtedly the best student in her year. No doubt and doubtless are much weaker expressions, often suggesting that the user is in fact not completely certain, or is even harbouring doubts: • No doubt he is very clever but I still can't understand what he is saying.
• As doubtless is an adverb, doubtlessly is incorrect.
• Some people mistakenly spell undoubtedly as undoubtably, perhaps confused with indubitably, which is a more formal and even stronger expression, suggesting that something cannot possibly be doubted: • It was indubitably evident that he had acted in a manner which was utterly unacceptable.

uneatable see eatable or edible?

unequivocally Note that the adverb unequivocally has the ending -ally, not -ably. It is derived from the adjective unequivocal, meaning 'clear, plain'.

unexceptionable or unexceptional? Unexceptionable means 'offensive; not liable to be criticized or objected to': • His behaviour had been unexceptionable, so he could not understand how he could have offended his hosts. Unexceptional means 'usual, normal, or ordinary': • The weather was unexceptional for the time of year. It is, however, more frequently used to suggest that something is dull or disappointingly commonplace: • I had heard enthusiastic reports of his playing, but I found this an unexceptional performance.
• The words are often confused, partly because it is quite possible for something to be both indifferent and rather dull.

unfair The adjective unfair is followed by the preposition to or on: • The present system is unfair to [or on] the self-employed.

-unfriendly see friendly.

uninterested see disinterested or uninterestest?

unique Unique means 'being the only one of its kind': • Every snowflake has a unique
pattern. A thing is either unique or it is not, so careful users dislike such expressions as 'so unique', 'rather unique', 'very unique', etc., and something cannot be more unique or less unique than something else. Almost and nearly are the only modifiers generally acceptable with unique.

- The word is widely used with a weaker meaning of 'unrivalled; outstanding', but many people object to such use. Intensifiers are often used with unique: • It was absolutely unique, but such expressions should be restricted to informal use.

United Kingdom seeBritain.

United States, United States of America see America.

unlike Careful users avoid employing unlike as a conjunction: • The man worked unlike he'd ever worked in his life.

unmistakable or unmistakable? Both spellings of this word are acceptable, but unmistakable is the more frequent in British English. See spelling 1.

unnecessary The adjective unnecessary is sometimes misspelled. Note the -nn- (from the addition of the prefix un- to the adjective necessary), the single -c-, and the -st-.

unorganized see disorganized or unorganized?

unpractical see practical or practicable?

unprecedented A precedent is 'an earlier example or occurrence of a similar thing', so unprecedented means 'never having happened before; completely new or original': • His score was unprecedented in the history of cricket.

- It has recently become a popular word, particularly in the media where its meaning has weakened to 'extremely great': • The film is enjoying an unprecedented success.

unreadable see illegible or unreadable?

unreparable see repairable or repairable?

unsociable, unsocial see antisocial, asocial, unsocial or unsociable?

until see till or until?

unused Like used, the word unused may be pronounced with the [s] sound of the noun use or the [z] sound of the verb use. In the phrase unused to, meaning 'unaccustomed to', unused is pronounced [ˈʌnɪ vested]: • I am unused to driving on the righthand side of the road. The adjective unused, meaning 'not being used' or 'never having been used', is pronounced [ˈʌnɪ vest] • Many of the rooms are unused. • Unused pills and tablets should be returned to the pharmacy for safe disposal.

unwaged The adjective and noun unwaged refers to anybody who does not receive a wage or salary. Such people include the unemployed, full-time mothers or housewives, students, and old age pensioners: • The membership fee is £5 (or £3 for the unwaged). The euphemistic use of the term unwaged in place of unemployed, with reference to those who are out of work and seeking employment, could be misleading and is best avoided.

unwanted or unwonted? Unwanted means simply 'not wanted': • She gave her unwanted clothes to The Oxfam shop. Unwonted means 'out of the ordinary; unusual': • The drug gave him an unwonted feeling of euphoria.

- The two words are confused because people sometimes mistakenly spell unwanted as unwonted, and frequently pronounce unwonted as unwanted. Unwanted should be pronounced [ˈʌnɪ vəntd] and unwonted [ˈʌnɪ vəntd], with the stressed syllable pronounced the same as the word won’t.

unwieldy This word is often misspelt. Note particularly the -ie- in the middle of the word.

up-front Some people dislike the increasing use of the term up-front, meaning 'paid in advance, at the beginning, or as a deposit': • an up-front payment • They want £500 up-front and the remainder in monthly instalments. The term should not be overused, and is best restricted to informal contexts.

upload see download and upload.

upon or on? These two words are synonyms and virtually indistinguishable in use:
• She threw herself upon the sofa. • He walked on the beach. On is more frequently used; upon has a more formal sound and is rarely heard in spoken English.

- In some cases usage is dictated by the fact that one or the other word is normal in a particular idiom: • once upon a time • on the contrary.
uptalk

Upon is used between two repeated nouns to suggest large numbers: • We walked mile upon mile.

uptalk This term refers to the increasing modern tendency to deliver statements as though they are questions, with the voice rising at the end of the sentence. Sometimes called up-speak or HRT (high-rise terminals), uptalk is variously thought to have originated in the USA, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand. It has become a target of criticism in recent years, especially in Britain. Popularity associated with teenagers in particular, it has also been detected among older and younger speakers: • Then we went round to Jack's house? Which was, like, really great? And then we out for a meal? And we all had the same thing?

Careful speakers avoid using uptalk, not only because it can be irritating to the listener, but also because it can project an image of weakness or insecurity, as if the user lacks confidence in the opinions he or she is advancing with such tentative intonation.

upward or upwards? In British English upward is principally used as an adjective, upwards being the usual form of the adverb meaning 'to a higher level': • an upward trend □ to float upwards.

• The adverb upward is more frequently used in American English.

See also -WARD or -WARDS?

The phrase upwards of, meaning 'more than', is disliked by some people: • The newly privatised company is in contention with America's Pratt & Whitney to supply the engines for upwards of 100 Boeing 757s that Texas Air is planning to order (Sunday Times).

upwardly mobile This is a vogue expression used of ambitious, usually young, people who are moving into a higher class, income bracket, etc.: • These days the City is thought to be full of upwardly mobile men and women trying to enhance their status in society.

urban or urbane? Urban means 'of a town or city': • Unemployment is higher in urban areas. Urbane is used of someone who is sophisticated and polite, with a smooth and easy manner in any social situation: • He turned out to be an elegant and urbane man who charmed them all.

• Urbane actually derives from urban for it describes a manner which was thought to be characteristic of a person who came from a city.

urinal This word may be stressed on either the second syllable [juərɪnəl] or the first syllable [jʊərɪnəl] in British English.

• The American English pronunciation is stressed on the first syllable.

US see WE.

US or OUR? see -ING FORMS.

US, USA see AMERICA.

usable or useable? Both spellings of this word are acceptable, but usable is the more frequent in British English. See SPELLING 3.

usage or use? Usage is the way in which something, especially language, is used; the noun use denotes the act of using: • This book deals with problems of usage. • in contemporary usage □ the use of wood as an insulator □ The photocopier is in use.

Careful users maintain this distinction between the two words, avoiding such phrases as: • a ban on the usage of hosepipes.

• Either usage or use may be used in the sense of 'amount or degree to which something is used': • increased usage/use of electricity, although some people dislike the use of usage in this context.

Usage also means 'treatment': • rough/gentle usage. The noun use has a variety of other meanings, such as 'usefulness': • What's the use of trying? □ 'wear': • to deteriorate through use, 'need': • Do you have a use for this box? □ 'the right to use': • to have the use of a company car.

Note the difference in pronunciation between the noun use [juːz] and the verb use [juːz]. Usage may be pronounced [juːzɪ] or [juːz].

useable see USABLE or USEABLE?

used In the phrase USED TO, used is pronounced [juːst]. Used as an adjective, for example in: • used cars, and as the past tense and past participle of the verb use is pronounced [juːzd].

used to Used to either means 'accustomed to': • I have used to the noise, or refers to a habitual action or situation in the past: • She used to play squash regularly.

• Difficulties arise over negative and question forms of the phrase in its second meaning, in negative forms the more formal used not to or
the more informal did not didn’t use to are both acceptable: * He used not to be so aggressive. * She did not use to like fish. Both used’t to and didn’t used to are heard, but are avoided by careful users.

In the question form the formal and rather old-fashioned used X to? and the less formal did X use to? are both correct: * Used there to be a lake in that wood? * Did Henry use to visit you? Did X used to? or didn’t X used to? are frequently heard, though disliked by many careful users. As no form sounds completely natural and correct many people would reconstruct the sentence and say, for example: * Was there once a lake in that wood? See also USED.

user-friendly User-friendly is a term used in computing to describe software that is simple to use, being designed to assist the user and forestall any potential problems: * a user-friendly program.

* The term is increasingly found in other fields, meaning ‘easy to operate or understand’, and describing electrical appliances, cars, books, etc.: * A drive to make the National Health Service ‘user-friendly’ was launched yesterday (Daily Telegraph). This implied association with advanced technology may impress some people but will alienate others; it is therefore advisable to reserve the term for its original purpose.

See also FRIENDLY.

User-hostile and user-unfriendly, opposites of user-friendly, are also found in certain contexts:

* complex, user-hostile systems which require complicated languages to programme and are hard to understand (The Guardian).

usher or usherette? see NON-SEXIST TERMS.

utilize *Utilize* means ‘use in a practical and effective, profitable or productive way’: * They utilized every machine that was available. It can also mean ‘make good use of something not intended for the purpose’: * She utilized her gifts when the fan belt broke; or ‘make use of something that might be thought useless’: * She utilized all the scraps for stuffing cushions.

* Utilize is often used, particularly in business jargon, as though it were merely a synonym for use: * Successful applicants will be able to utilize their experience and skills in this field. However, careful users restrict the word to the narrower senses described above.
vacant or vacuous? Both these adjectives mean 'empty', but they are not generally interchangeable in usage. The adjective vacant is most frequently applied to a flat, room, seat, post, etc., that is not occupied by a person or people: • a hotel with vacant rooms; • The post remained vacant for several months after her resignation. The adjective vacuous is used in formal contexts often in the derogatory sense of ‘apparently devoid of intelligence; inane; mindless’; • a vacuous remark • Modern pop music is vacuous, repetitive, and uninspiring.

Both vacant and vacuous may also be applied to a person's expression, or to a gaze or stare: • a vacant expression suggests a temporary lack of concentration, attention, or awareness; • a vacuous expression suggests a lack of intelligence.

vacation In British English the primary meaning of the noun vacation is 'the period when universities and law courts are not officially working'; • She went home for the Christmas vacation.

In American English the main meaning of vacation is 'a holiday'; • They took a vacation in Miami. It is also used as a verb: • We vacationed in Europe last year.

A further meaning of the word is 'vacating; making vacant or empty'; • The landlord insisted on immediate vacation of the house.

vaccine see inoculate or vaccinate?

vaccination see vac or vacuous?

vagary The noun vagary, meaning 'whim', 'caprice', or 'unpredictable change'; • the vagaries of the weather, causes problems of pronunciation. In British English the noun is usually pronounced [vəˈɡərɪ], the pronunciation [vəˈɡəɹɪ] is less frequent and may be regarded as an Americanism. Note also that there is no -e- after the -g-, either in pronunciation or spelling.

vain, vane or vein? These three words are sometimes confused, being identical in pronunciation. Vain is an adjective, meaning 'conceited; exquisitely proud' or 'worthless; futile': • the vain parents of talented children • a vain attempt to increase productivity. Vane and vein are nouns. A vane is a flat blade moved by wind or water: • a weather vane; a vein is a blood vessel, a thin layer of ore in rock, etc.

• Vain is also used in the phrase in vain, meaning 'to no avail': • She tried in vain to dissuade him. Vain is also used in figurative contexts, referring to a style, mood, quality, or trait: • another remark in the same vein • a vein of irony in the novel.

vale or veil? Vale means 'valley' or 'dale': • The hill commands fine views of the vale. It should not be confused with veil, which describes a fine layer of lace or other material masking a view: • The bride lifted her veil. • The mountains were hidden by a veil of mist.

value-added The adjective value-added, meaning 'having extra value' or 'having extra features', has appeared with increasing frequency in recent years: • value-added food products, • value-added services. Care should be taken not to overuse the phrase in these figurative applications, as many people find it jargonistic.

vantage see advantage or vantage?

vaporize Note the spelling of the verb vaporize, meaning 'change into vapour'. The -u- of vapour is dropped before the suffix -ize.

• The variant spelling vaporise is equally correct (see -ize or -ise?).

variant CJD see mad cow disease

variegated This word, meaning 'having different colours; diverse': • variegated leaves, is sometimes misspelt. Note the e between the i and the g.

various Many people dislike the use of various as a pronoun, usually followed by of, and seek alternative wordings: • He was betrayed by various of his colleagues.
ve see of.

veil see VALE or VEIL.

vein see VAIN, VANE or VEIN.

venal or venial? Venal means literally 'for sale' and it is used either of individuals who are capable of being 'bought' or corrupted, or of systems which operate by bribery and corruption: • Their legal system is so venal that criminals openly offer bribes in court. Venial means 'pardonable; excusable' and is applied to minor faults and offences: • He was inclined to be thoughtless but that was a venial fault in one so young.

• In Roman Catholic theology a venial sin is one that does not deprive the soul of divine grace, as opposed to a mortal sin.

vengeance see REVENGE or VENGEANCE.

venison This word, meaning 'the meat of a deer', is usually pronounced [vɛnɪˈznən] or [vənɪˈznən], although the traditional pronunciation is [vəˈnɪznən].

venue The usual meaning of venue is 'the place where a meeting, event, or gathering happens': • We have not yet decided on the venue for the annual conference.

• There is a sense of people coming together to a particular place for a purpose. However, recent usage, to the dislike of some, makes venue virtually synonymous with place, scene, or setting, as the site of any activity: • A valley in South Wales is the venue for this experiment in self-sufficient communal living.

verbal or oral? Verbal means 'expressed in words' while oral means 'relating to the mouth' or 'expressed in speech'. Something verbal can be expressed in either speech or writing. However, a verbal agreement is generally understood to mean one that is spoken and not written.

• Some careful users feel that, despite the established use of verbal in this way, it is always better to use an oral agreement, as there is no risk of misunderstanding or ambiguity with the word oral.

verbal nouns see INFinitive, -ING FORMS.

verbs Verbs refer to actions, occurrences, or existence. They vary in form according to the tense or mood used, usually in a predictable way but, with irregular verbs, in various different ways which need to be learned.

• Verbs differ in their functions. One distinction is between transitive and intransitive verbs. A transitive verb is one that needs a direct object, for example, like. One cannot just like; one has to like someone or something. Either it must take a direct object: • He likes chocolate, or it can be used in the passive: • She is liked by everyone. Intransitive verbs do not take a direct object. Fall, for example, is an intransitive verb: • The leaves are falling from the trees. Some verbs can be used both transitively and intransitively in different constructions: • The boat sailed out of the harbour. – She sailed the boat out of the harbour.

Some transitive verbs are reflexive verbs, where the subject and object are the same: • perjure oneself. In this example the verb is always reflexive: one cannot perjure anyone or anything other than oneself. But some verbs are not always used reflexively: • I introduced myself to our hostess. – I introduced Chris to our hostess.

Auxiliary verbs are those used with other verbs, enabling them to express variations in tense, mood, voice, etc. The most frequently used auxiliaries are be, have, and do: • He is tired. • I have finished. • We did not agree. Be is used to form the passive: • It was discussed. Other auxiliaries include: shall, should, can, could, will, would, may, might, and must: • I shall accept the offer. • You must stop immediately. This second group of auxiliary verbs, which cannot be used as full verbs (unlike be, have, and do) are also called modal verbs.

See also DARE, NEED.

Phrasal verbs are verbs which include an adverb, preposition, or both: • give in • throw away • take to. Many such verbs have meanings which go beyond the sum of their parts, for example came by as in: • I came by [i.e., obtained or received] that engraving in Venice. Some mean no more than the words suggest: • keep down • stay away. The modern trend to extend ordinary verbs so that they become phrasal verbs, while adding nothing to their meaning: • I consulted (with) my accountant is disliked by many.

New verbs are formed in various ways. One way is by converting nouns: • He serviced her car (see NOUNS). A variation of this is the formation of compound verbs: • a rubber-stamp • blue-pencil • inflation-proof • tap-score • raise • down-grade. These verbs are often disliked when first introduced but they have the advantage of economy, if not of elegance: • I shall word-process the letters is briefer than I shall produce the letters on a word processor.
verbs — see irregular verbs table, page 317

vermillion The noun and adjective vermi-

illion, meaning 'bright red', is sometimes

misspelt. Note that vermilion has a single

-l-, unlike the word million.

vertex or vortex A vertex is the highest

point or a point where two or more lines

intersect; a vortex is the spiralling motion of

a whirlpool or whirlwind or, metaphorically,
an activity that one is drawn into like a

whirlpool or whirlwind: • the vertex of a

triangle • the vortex of rebellion.

The plural of vertex is vertices or vertices; the

plural of vortex is vortexes or vortices.

very Very can be used as an intensifier

before most adjectives and adverbs: • very

unpleasant • very efficiently. However, be-

fore past participles much is used instead of

very: • It was much improved. The exception

is when the past participle is used adjectiv-

ally: • She was very excited.

Some words come into a grey area where either

very or much can be used: • She was very much

distressed. Much usually has a more formal sound.

There are other participles which cannot take

either very or much as an intensifier, although

they can take very if an adverb is interposed:

one cannot be very wounded but can be very

badly wounded; one cannot say very mended

but can say very neatly mended.

veterinary This word causes problems

with spelling and pronunciation. Note

the -ery- and the -ary ending. The word

is frequently pronounced [vərənərɪ], [vərə-

nərɪ], or [vətənrɪ], although careful users

insist on the pronunciation with five syllables

[ˈvɛtənərɪ].

The expression veterinary surgeon is usually

shortened to vet.

via Via means 'by way of' and is used when

talking of the route for a journey: • They

went to Australia via Hong Kong. • Your best

route would be via the M6.

It is also used to mean 'by means of': • I’ll return

it via Fred, or to speak of a means of transport: •

We crossed the Channel via the ferry, but many

people dislike these usages, particularly the latter

one.

The pronunciation normally regarded as correct

is [vɪə] although [veɪə] is sometimes heard.

viable Viable means 'capable of living or

surviving independently': • a viable foetus.

It can be used figuratively in this sense of

new communities: • When the colony shows

itself to be viable, it will be granted indepen-

dence.

• The meaning has been extended to 'capable of

carrying on without extra (financial) support': • The

business is expected to be commercially viable

within two years.

Sometimes the meaning is even further ex-

tended to become synonymous with workable,

practicable, feasible: • a viable partnership • a

viable plan. This loose use of viable is objected to

by many careful users.

vice versa This expression, meaning 'with

the order reversed', is usually pronounced

[vɪs vərsə]. Alternative pronunciations for

the first word are: [vɪs] and [vɪs].

vicious or viscous Vicious means 'wicked'

or 'ferocious'; viscous describes a liquid that

is thick and sticky: • a vicious dog • viscous

paint.

The two adjectives are sometimes confused,

being similar in form and pronunciation. The c

of vicious is soft [vɪʃus]; the c of viscous is hard

[vɪkəs]. The word viscous is largely restricted to

formal or technical contexts.

The word vicious also occurs in the expression

vicious circle, denoting a problematic situation that

creates new problems leading back to the original

situation: • the vicious circle of debt. This is often

correctly rendered as vicious cycle.

victuals This word, meaning 'supplies of

food', is pronounced [vɪktʊlz].

• A victualler, 'a licensed purveyor of spirits', is

pronounced [vɪktələr].

video The prefix video-, from the Latin

videre meaning 'to see', is found in such

words as video-recorder, videophone, and

video-camera. It is increasingly used in the

senses of 'relating to video' or 'by video', some-
times hyphenated and some-
times unhyphenated: • video link • Video-

conferencing is the latest factor in revolu-

tionizing boardroom practice around the

world.
### IRREGULAR VERBS

Cross-references, e.g. see HANGED or HUNG?, are also included to main entries in the Good Word Guide where there is a fuller discussion.

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**vigorous** This word, meaning ‘healthy and strong’, is often misspelt. Note that the **u** of **vigour** is dropped before the suffix **-ous**.

**vilify** Note the spelling of this verb, used in formal contexts to mean ‘malign; defame’, particularly the single **-i-**.

**virtual** The word virtual has acquired new relevance with the development of computer technology, being used to describe the hypothetical environments created by computer games, the Internet, etc.: virtual community • virtual classroom • virtual advertising. Care must be taken with the use of virtual and virtually in this and other senses, to avoid ambiguity.

- Virtual reality originally referred chiefly to interactive computer games, where the player’s movements may be mirrored by a character in a hypothetical computer-generated world. The phrase has since come to be used more widely, in particular to television shows that invite some degree of viewer participation: • Television ratings on both sides of the Atlantic are now dominated by the virtual-reality game show.

**vis-à-vis** Vis-à-vis literally means ‘face to face’ and is most frequently used as a preposition to mean ‘in relation to’: • We shall have to change our policy vis-à-vis the law. It also means ‘opposite’ or ‘face to face with’ and is sometimes used as a noun to mean ‘someone or something opposite another; a counterpart’. It is also occasionally used as a synonym for tête-à-tête, meaning ‘a private conversation between two people’.

- It is pronounced [vee-zee-vess].

**viscous** see **vicious** or **viscous**

**visible** There is a recent fashionable use of visible to mean ‘in the public eye; well known’: • He’s one of the more visible cabinet ministers. It can also be more or less synonymous with having a high profile, with the meaning of ‘being in a position where one’s actions are liable to become subject to public comment or notice’: • The role of
vision statement

Director of Social Services is an increasingly visible one. As some object to these uses of visible, care should be taken to avoid overworking this word.

vision statement see MISSION STATEMENT.

visit or visitation1 In its most frequent use visit is a verb meaning 'pay a call on, stay with as a guest, stay somewhere temporarily' and a noun meaning 'an act of visiting'; • I will visit Venice when I am in Italy. • He was on a visit to his daughter. A visitation is an official or formal act of visiting; • The vicar's work includes the visitation of parishioners in hospital, and is often found in humorous use, referring to an unwelcome visit: • I'm awaiting a visitation from the VAT man.

Visitation can also refer to the visit of a supernatural being: • a visitation of angels, and is also used in referring to an act of affliction, either natural or divine: • the visitation of the Black Death • the visitation of God's wrath.

visually impaired Visually impaired is the preferred modern alternative to BLIND, which is considered unacceptable by many people because of its negative connotations.

vital The adjective vital is followed by the preposition to or for: • Their co-operation is vital to [or for] the success of the mission.

vitamin The traditional British pronunciation of this word is [vɪtəmɪn].

• The American English pronunciation [vɪtəmɪn], the first syllable of which rhymes with bite, is now acceptable in British English although disliked by some people.

voluntarily Careful users of British English stress this word on the first syllable [vʊləntərɪli].

• Such users object to the alternative pronunciation, with stress on the third syllable [vʊləntərɪli], though this is acceptable in American English.

vortex see VELOCITY or VORTEX2

vote The idiomatic expression to vote with one's feet means to show disapproval of something by staying away, not participating in it, not buying it and so on. The underlying image is of a dissatisfied crowd of people walking out of an auditorium or a hall. Recently it has been used in an opposite sense meaning to show approval by attending or taking something up in large numbers, but this is strictly incorrect.

vowel A vowel is the sound represented by any of the letters a, e, i, o, and u in the English language. Compare CONSONANT.

• The presence of a vowel at the beginning of a word may affect the form or pronunciation of the preceding word (see A or AN?; THE).

Note that in such words as • unit and • uranium, the letter u- produces the combined consonant and vowel sound [yʊ].
W

w- or wh? The spellings of words beginning with w- and wh- are easily confused as they are pronounced the same by the majority of English speakers (exceptions including Scottish speakers of English). Examples of such confusable words include which and witch, what and which, and while and while, all of which have different meanings.

- Note that a small number of words can be spelt either way with the same meaning, e.g. wacky/whacky, weal/wheel.

wage, wages see salary or wage?

waist or waste? These two words are occasionally confused since they are pronounced the same [waist]. Wait refers to that part of the body between the ribs and the hips and thus to any similar narrow part of something: • The dancer had a tiny waist. It should not be confused with waste, which as a noun means `relish' or `unwanted material': • The process creates little waste, and as a verb `squander': • to waste well-earned money.

wait or weight? These two words are occasionally confused since they are pronounced the same [wait]. Wait means `stay' or `delay action': • They waited until the parade had passed. It should not be confused with weight, which is chiefly used as a noun meaning `heaviness' or `relative mass': • He took the weight of the sack on his shoulders, and is also used as a verb (see weigh or weight?).

See also AWAIT or WAIT?

waiter or waitress? see non-sexist terms.

waive or wave? These two words are sometimes confused. The verb waive means `relinquish': • The judge waived the penalty; waive means `move to and fro': • wave goodbye • The corn waved in the wind. The noun waive means `ridge of water'.

- The noun waiver comes from the verb waive: • a waiver clause in a contract, it must not be confused with the verb waver which means `fluctuate or hesitate; become unsteady': • Throughout his suffering his faith never wavered. • a waverung voice.

wake, waken see awake, awakened, wake or waken?

wander or wonder? These spellings are sometimes confused. Wander means `roam aimlessly': • He wandered through the streets; wonder means `be astonished at' or `think about': • I wonder where she is.

- The pronunciation of wander is [wàndə]; the pronunciation of wonder [wàndə] rhymes with thunder.

wannabe A wannabe is a person who strives to emulate another, especially a young fan who mimics a famous person in appearance, behaviour, etc.: • a horde of Madonna wannabes.

- The word wannabe, from the phrase (I) want to be like ..., is sometimes spelt wannabe. It is best restricted to informal contexts.

want As a verb the main meanings of want are `to desire': • I want a bigger car, `toned': • That door wants mending, and `to lack': • The door wants a handle. As a noun it means `something desired; a desire for something; a lack' or is used as a synonym for poverty: • the want experienced by the unemployed. Want to is often used in informal contexts to mean `ought to': • You want to be more careful.

- There is controversy over whether want can be used with a present participle as in: • I want my hair cutting. This usage is a standard regional variation in British English, although more people would say I want my hair cut. This latter form can lead to ambiguity. • I want the picture fixing on the wall is clearer than • I want the picture fixed on the wall, which could indicate a desire for a particular picture, • I want the picture to be fixed on the wall is unambiguous and avoids the use of the present participle, which is generally considered unsuitable for any but informal use.
-ward or -wards? The adverbial suffixes -ward and -wards are used to indicate direction. Both forms are equally correct, although -wards is usually preferred in British English and -ward in American English.

Most of these adverbs have a related adjective ending in -ward. The adjectival suffix cannot be replaced by -wards.

For further discussion and additional information see AFTERWARD or AFTERWARDS?, BACKWARD or BACKWARDS?, and other individual entries.

ware or where? Ware is usually used in the plural, meaning 'goods' or 'products': • Customers flocked to see the company's wares. It should not be confused with where, meaning 'to or at what place': • Let me show you where to go.

-ware or -wear? The ending -ware denotes goods of the specified type or material; the ending -wear denotes clothing: • glassware • computer software • knitwear • leather footwear. The two endings are sometimes confused: • Dawn French, who is planning to open a knitwear shop (The Bookseller).

In computing, the ending -ware has been used to coin a number of nouns on the model of hardware and software. These include: • groupware (a set of related software) • coursework (educational software) • vapourware (software that has yet to be produced) • liveware (human beings).

warn or worn? These two words are occasionally confused since they are pronounced the same [worn]. Warn means 'caution' or 'advise of danger': • They were warned about their behaviour. It should not be confused with worn, the past participle of wear, which is also used as an adjective: • That tyre is badly worn.

was see WERE or WAS?

wastage or waste? Waste is used as a verb, noun, and adjective. As a noun its main meanings are 'squandering, using carelessly or ungratefully': • It was a complete waste of time and money; or 'rubbish; unwanted material': • Get rid of all this waste. Wastage is a noun meaning 'loss due to leakage, decay, erosion, evaporation, etc.': • the wastage of water from a reservoir • petrol stored in garages is subject to wastage. Another meaning, usually occurring in the phrase natural wastage, refers to the loss of employees through resignation, retirement, or death.

Wastage is sometimes used as a synonym for waste but it should be confined to the meanings outlined above.

waste see WAST or WASTE?

watercooler TV The term watercooler TV refers to popular television programmes that are the subject of informal conversation among friends or work colleagues (i.e. the sort of programmes that people talk about around the office watercooler). These may be soap operas, reality TV shows, situation comedies, etc.; the term is generally not applied to documentaries or current-affairs programmes that would provoke more serious discussion.

wave, waver see WAIVE or WAVE?

way The use of way as an adverb, meaning 'considerably', is best restricted to informal contexts: • The film is way too long. • Her hair is way too short. It should also be restricted to very informal contexts when used as an adverb meaning 'extremely': • That's a way cool jacket.

-ways see -WISE or -WAYS?

we We is used to mean 'I and one or more other people': • We should get a divorce. • Shall we all go for a walk?

It was formerly used to mean 'if' by monarchs: • We grant by royal decree... and is sometimes used by writers to give an impression of impersonality: • We shall discuss this in a later chapter. We is sometimes used to mean 'you', usually in addressing children or invalids in a somewhat patronizing manner: • We are in a nasty temper today, aren't we? • Are we feeling better this morning? Mistakes are sometimes made in the use of we and us. We is correct with a plural noun as the subject: • We children used to play there. Us is correct when the noun is the object: • It won't help us workers.

weal, wheal or wheel? The noun wheel, denoting a circular object, is by far the most common of these three words: • the wheels of a bicycle • a steering wheel • a spinning wheel. The nouns weal and wheal are interchangeable in the sense of 'raised mark on
the skin (usually caused by a blow from a whip, cane, etc.), *weal* being the more frequent: • *The weals [or wheals] on his back suggested that he had been beaten.*
• *Weal* is also an archaic or literary word meaning 'welfare' or 'prosperity': • *the public weal* • *the common weal.*

**-wear** see **WARE** or **WEAR?**

**weather, wether or whether**? These three spellings are sometimes confused. The noun *weather* (see *WEATHER CONDITIONS*) and the conjunction *whether* (see *WHETHER*) are far more common than the noun *wether*, which denotes a (castrated) male sheep.

**weather conditions** *Weather* means 'the condition of the atmosphere, especially in respect of sunshine, rainfall, wind, etc.' As the word contains *condition* in its meaning, careful users maintain that it is tautological to talk of *weather conditions*, as in: • *The bad weather conditions stopped play.* • *The freezing weather conditions in the north will not improve.*

**weatherman or weathergirl?** see **NON-SEXIST TERMS.**

**weaved, wove or woven**? The usual past tense of *weave* is *wove*: • *She wove the cloth herself.* • *The spider wove its web.* Woven is the usual past participle of *weave*: • *It was woven by hand.* • *They were wearing woven garments.*

• In some senses of *weave*, *weaved* is used for the past tense or past participle, as when *weave* means 'continue or produce a complicated story': • *She weaved a sinister plot; 'lurch or stagger';* • *He weaved drunkenly down the street;* and *move around vehicles to avoid hitting them.* • *The car weaved in and out of all the traffic.*

**web** see **WORLD WIDE WEB.**

**Webish** see **NETSPEAK.**

**wed or wedded?** The use of the verb *wed* in the sense of 'marry' is rather old-fashioned, formal, or literary; in modern usage it is chiefly found in newspaper headlines: • *Doctor wedd former patient.* Either *wed* or *wedded* may be used as the past tense or past participle of the verb in this sense: • *They wed [or wedded] the following spring.* • *They were wed [or wedded] by her uncle.*

• When the past participle is used adjectively (often in combination with an adverb), *wed* is preferred to *wedded*: • *the newlywed couple* • *her twice-wed father.* In the formal and figurative sense of 'committed' or 'closely connected', the past participle *wedded* is preferred to *wed*: • *He seems wedded to the idea.* • *Malnutrition is wedded to poverty.*

**Wednesday** The name of this day of the week is usually pronounced [weznidi], although careful users prefer to sound the *d* [weznidi] or [wezniday].

**weigh or weight?** To *weigh* is to measure the weight of something; to *weight* is to add weight to something: • *The box weighs 3 kg.* • *We weighted the tarpaulin with stones so that it would not blow away.*

• Both words may be used in the figurative sense of 'oppress': • *They are weighted/weighted down with problems.*

*Weigh* is the more frequent of the two verbs, being used in a variety of other senses: • To *weigh* ['raise'] anchor • To *weigh up* ['assess'] the pros and cons • To *weigh* ['consider carefully'] one's words. The verb *weight* is also used in the sense of 'bias': • The legislation must not be weighted towards the rich. A London weighting allowance is an extra sum of money paid to some people who work in London, where the cost of living is high.

Note the *-igh-* spelling of the two words.

*Weight* is sometimes misspelt with the ending *-th*, on the model of *length, weight, etc.*

See also *WAIT* or *WIGHT?*

**weird** This word, meaning 'uncanny or extraordinary', is sometimes misspelt. Note the *-i-* spelling.

**well** see **AS WELL AS.** **GOOD** or **WELL?**

**well or well?** When used as part of an adjectival compound, such as *well-aimed*, whether *well* is hyphenated or not depends on its position in relation to the noun or verb in the sentence. If placed before the noun, a hyphen is usual: • *a well-aimed remark.* If placed after the verb, it is usual to omit the hyphen: • *Her remarks were well aimed.*

**were or was?** Difficulty is sometimes experienced in the use of the subjunctive form *were* in phrases expressing supposition. The basic rule is that *were* is used when the suggestion is of something hypothetical, unlikely, or not actually the case: • *If I were you, I'd leave him.* • *She talks to
me as if I were three years old. If the supposition is factual or realistic then was is used: • I'm sorry if I was rude.

• When a supposition might be possible or factual then either was or were may be used: • They behaved as if it was their own house. The more doubt there is, the more appropriate it is to use were.

west, West or western? As an adjective, west is always written with a capital W when it forms part of a proper name: • the West End • the West Country. The noun west is usually written with a capital W when it denotes a specific region, such as the non-communist countries of Europe and America: • She defected to the West in 1986.

• In other contexts, and as an adverb, west is usually written with a lower-case w: • Drive west until you reach the border. • We camped on the west bank of the river. • The sun sets in the west. The adjective western is more frequent and usually less specific than the adjective west: • the western side of the island • in western Scotland.

Like west, western is written with a capital W when it forms part of a proper name, such as Western Australia. With or without a capital W, it also means 'of the West': • western/Western technology. A western is a film, novel, etc., about life in the western USA in the 19th century.

westward or westwards? Westward is the correct choice when an adjective is needed: • a westward direction. Either westward or westwards may be used when an adverb is required: • They travelled westward from the city. • The skies were full of birds flying westwards.

See also -ward or -wards?

wet or wetted? The verb to wet means 'make wet': • Don't keep wetting your lips, and 'urinate in or on something': • Children often wet their beds when they are anxious. The usual past tense or participle is wet: • The baby has wet its nappy again. However, in the passive, wetted is used: The sheets have been wetted is less ambiguous than the sheets have been wet.

wet or what? These two spellings are sometimes confused. Wet means 'cover with moisture': • to wet one's lips; what means 'stimulate or sharpen': • what someone's appetite.

• A whetstone is a stone used for sharpening knives, etc.; a wet stone is simply a stone that is damp.

wether see weather, wether or whether?

wetted see wet or wetted?

wh- see w- or wh-?

whammy see double whammy.

wharf or wharves? Either wharfs or wharves is acceptable as the plural of the noun wharf, denoting a place where ships dock for loading and unloading. Wharver is the more frequent form.

what A difficulty in the use of the pronoun what is whether it should be followed by a singular or plural verb. In general the rule is that when what means 'that which' it takes a singular verb, even if the complement is plural, and when it means 'those which' it takes a plural verb: • What we need is a ladder. • What he likes best is expensive restaurants. • I mentioned what I thought were the most important points.

• What cannot follow a noun or pronoun. Constructions such as: • the man what I was talking to are wrong.

what or which? In a question, the use of what or which affects the interpretation of the meaning. Which chooses from a limited range of alternatives; what is used in more general enquiries.

• Thus • Which film are you going to see? suggests that the speaker has several possible films in mind; whereas • What film are you going to see? shows that the speaker is probably unaware of the choice of the various films.

whatever or what ever? If ever is used to intensify what the expression is written as two words in formal writing: • What ever ['What on earth?] did he say next? In less formal writing, one word is sometimes used, but careful writers object to this usage. If whatever means 'no matter what', it is written as one word: • I'll write whatever I like. • Whatever the weather he always wears a vest. • There is no chance whatever of him winning.

• A similar rule applies to the use of however and however, when ever and whenever, where ever and wherever, which ever and whichever, and who ever and whoever: • How ever did you find out? – However carefully I wash my hair, it always looks untidy; • Where ever did you buy such a hat?
– Wherever you travel, you’ll find businesses that accept our credit card. • Who ever told you that? –
Whoever wrote this had a strange sense of humour.

wheal, wheel see WEAL. WHEAL or WHEEL?

whence Whence is a formal, rarely used word meaning ‘from where; from what place’: • The monster returned to the swamp whence it had appeared.
• From whence is more frequently used; as in: •
The country from whence they came, although the
from is redundant, being contained in the meaning
of whence, and many people consider from
whence to be incorrect. However, as whence is
now a word whose use tends to sound either old-
fashioned, affected, or jocular it is probably better
to avoid both whence and from whence alto-
gether.

See also HENCE. THENCE.

whenever or when ever? see WHATEVER or WHAT EVER?

where see WARE or WHERE?

whereabouts The noun whereabouts, meaning ‘place where somebody or something is’, may be used with a singular or plural verb; • The whereabouts of the original
manuscript remains [or remain] a secret. • Her
whereabouts are [or is] unknown.

wherever or where ever? see WHATEVER or WHAT EVER?

what see WET or WHET?

whether Whether can be used to introduce an indirect question: • He asked whether we were going. Here it is synonymous with if
but sounds rather more formal. Whether
is also used to introduce alternatives or consider possibilities and is virtually interchange able with if; • I wonder whether/if she’ll come. • I don’t know whether/if it is
correct.

• In these cases there is some confusion concerning the use of whether or not, as in: • He has not
decided whether [or not] to stay. Here, where the
sense is ‘if he is staying’ the or not can be con
sidered redundant. It is only necessary when the
sense is ‘regardless of whether or not’ as in: • He
has decided to stay, whether or not he can afford it.

See also WEATHER, WETHER or WHETHER?

which see THAT or WHICH?; WHAT or WHICH?

while or whilst? As a conjunction while
means ‘during the time that; as long as’ and
it is also used to mean ‘although; whereas’: •
I shall be doing his work while he’s away on
holiday. • Elisabeth votes Labour while her
husband votes Conservative. Whilst has the
same meanings but is rarely used; it tends
to sound formal and old-fashioned.
• Many people dislike the use of while or whilst in
the sense of ‘although; whereas’ as it can give rise
to ambiguity. • While she was studying literature
she disliked poetry could mean ‘during the time
she was studying literature’ or ‘although she was
studying literature’.

whisky or whiskey? The alcoholic drink
distilled in Scotland is spelled whisky, which is
the more frequent spelling in British English.
The alcoholic drink distilled in the
USA or Ireland is spelled whiskey, the usual
spelling in American English.

white As a term describing skin colour,
white is less contentious than nonwhite (see NON),
but is still avoided by some users. An
alternative is to refer to a person’s geograp
ical origin, rather than his or her skin
colour: • Europeans are a minority in this part of
the world.

who The pronoun who is normally used in
reference to human beings (which being
used for nonhumans): • the man who runs
the shop. However, it is acceptable to use
who in referring to animals, to countries in
certain contexts, and to a group of people,
especially when taking a plural verb: • cats
who refuse to eat leftovers • Greece who
joined the European Community in 1981 • the
band who plays the loudest.

• That can be used to refer to human beings and
things in defining clauses (see THAT or WHICH?): •
the man that [or who] runs the shop • the band
that [or who or which] plays the loudest • the
woman that [or who, or the formally correct
whom] you just saw.

Care must be taken with the punctuation of phrases containing who. • The boys who attend
public schools, regularly in pubs changes its
meaning if the commas are omitted. Without the
commas, who introduces a restrictive (or defining)
clause, suggesting specific boys; those that attend
public school. With commas, the additional clause
merely adds extra information about the boys.

who or whom? Who is used when it is the
subject of a verb and whom when it is the
object of a verb or preposition: • the boy who delivers the papers • the woman whom you just saw • the people to whom I was talking. Whom is falling into disuse, especially in questions. • Whom did you give it to? is formally correct but most people would now use who. As a relative pronoun, whom should still be used, when correct, in formal writing.
• While many careful users feel that it is important to use whom when it is correct to do so, most would consider that the use of who for whom is far less of a mistake than the use of whom when who is correct, as in: • The children, whom she thought were dead, had been saved. The temptation is to use whom because it is felt that this is the object of she thought, but it is not. She thought is a more or less independent part of the sentence; it could even be moved to another part of the sentence. It is not an object of she thought that is needed, but a subject (who) of the phrase were dead.

whodunit This word, used in informal contexts to describe a detective story, may be spelt whodunit or, less frequently, whodunit.
• It is, of course, an abbreviation of the ungrammatical who done it?

whoever or who ever? see whatever or what ever?

whoever or whomever? Many users are unclear about the difference between these two words. Both mean 'whatever person'; whoever, like who (see who or whom?), is used as the subject of a verb: • Whoever broke it must pay for the repair, and whomever, like whom, is used as the object of a verb or preposition: • Bring whomever you want to the party. Since it sounds very formal, whomever has become relatively rare and is now commonly replaced by whoever.

wholly see holy, holey or wholly?; spelling 4.

whom see who or whom?

whomever see whoever or whomever?

whoop This word, meaning 'express delight', as in: • Sally whooped excitedly, is sometimes mispronounced. The correct pronunciation is [woop].
• Note, however, that whooping as in whooping cough is pronounced [hooping].

whose or who's? These spellings are sometimes confused. Whose means 'of whom' or 'of which': • the children, whose father had left them • political parties whose ideas are old-fashioned • Whose book is that? Who's is a contraction of who is or who has: • Who's coming to dinner tonight?
• Some people object to the use of whose in the sense of 'of which', referring to things rather than people: • an old teapot, the handle of which (not whose handle) had been broken for many years. Others, however, find the construction the . . . of which an unnecessarily wordy substitute for whose . . .

wicked Like bad, the adjective wicked is used as slang term of approval, especially by young people: • His new bike is well wicked.
• Jonathon Green in Neologisms: new words since 1960 comments on its origin: 'The term has arrived via two borrowings: the first from standard English via black Americans, and subsequently by the white young from their black counterparts.'

wilful Note the spelling of this word, which has a single I in the middle and at the end in British English. In American English the -el ending of will is retained in the spelling willful.

will see shall or will?

window Window has various well-established metaphorical uses. It can mean 'something that allows people to see something they might otherwise not see': • The programme is a window on the closed world of the monastery; or 'an opportunity to display something': • The exhibition is the annual window of domestic design.
• A more recent use is 'a gap, an interval of time': • a window of opportunity, though care should be taken to avoid overworking this expression; • Is there a window in my diary next week for that meeting with Dempster? (Vodafone advertisement, Daily Telegraph). • There should be a clear window between the arrival of the interim report and the publication of the final conclusions.

-wise or -ways? The suffix -ways combines with certain abstract nouns to form an adverb meaning 'in (such) a way, direction, or manner': • sideways • lengthways. It has a more limited use than -wise, which can combine with various nouns to mean either 'in the position or direction of': •
clockwise • lengthwise or 'in the manner of':
• to walk crabwise. The use of -wise to mean
'in respect of' in such expressions as:
moneywise • weatherwise • careerwise
• taxwise • performancewise is becoming
increasingly popular, but is disliked by many
people.

with When a singular subject is linked to
something else by with it should take a
singular verb: • The Prime Minister with
senior members of the Cabinet has been con-
sidering the problem. The same rule applies
even when a singular subject comprises
several individuals or entities: • The band
with members of the road crew has been given
rooms at a local hotel.
• The usual pronunciation in British English is
[wɪð]; [wɪθ] is a regional variation.

withhold This word, meaning 'keep back',
is sometimes misspelt. Note the -th- in the
middle of this word, unlike the word
threshold.
• The correct pronunciation [wɪθhəʊld] should
ensure that the word is spelt correctly.

woman As a general term for an adult
female human being, woman is more ac-
ceptable than female, girl, or lady: • The
prize was won by a woman from Brighton.
• The noun female (see FEMALE or FEMININE?) is
best reserved for animals and plants. It may be
applied to human beings when the question of
age makes woman or women inappropriate: • He
shares the house with five females: his wife and
their four young daughters. In most other cases it
is considered inelegant, contemptuous, or offensive.
As an adjective, however, female is only marginally
less acceptable than woman and is preferable to
lady. • There are two female doctors and one male
doctor at the local surgery. • Female drivers do not
have more road accidents than male drivers.

A girl is a female child or adolescent. The term is
often used as a synonym for 'woman' but is
considered patronizing or disrespectful by some
people in some contexts, especially when used by
men.

The word lady has connotations of nobility,
dignity, and good manners: • the Lady of the
manor. • She may be wealthy but she's no lady! It
is used in polite address, as in formal or official
contexts: • This lady would like to speak to the
manager. • Ladies and gentlemen ¿. However, it
is sometimes regarded as a term of condescension,
especially in such phrases as the cleaning lady,
which may be replaced by the cleaning woman or,
more simply, the cleaner.

As a general rule, female, girl, and lady are best
restricted to contexts where male, boy, or gentle-
man would be used of the opposite sex.

See also MAN. NON-SEXIST TERMS: SEXISM.

wonder The verb wonder is followed by
the preposition at in the sense 'marvel': • I
wondered at his strength and by about in
the sense 'speculate': • I wondered about the
reason for his departure.

See also WANDER or WONDER.

wonk In American English the word wonk
is an insulting slang term for someone who
is studious or works hard: • That guy's a real
wonk.

wont This old-fashioned word is used to
mean 'inclined or accustomed': • They were
wont to have tea at 4 o'clock every day and in
the expression at one's wont. Its pronunciation
is the same as that of the word won't
[wʌnt].

wood or would? Wood refers to trees or
timber: • They entered the wood. • The frame
is made of wood. It should not be confused
with the modal verb would: • She would not
do as she was told.

woolly Note the spelling of this word: -oo-
and -Il- in British English; -oo- and single
-I- in American English. Similarly, the
adjective woolen has -Il- in British English
and a single -I- in American English.

workman or workwoman? see NON-SEXIST
TERMS.

World Wide Web The term World Wide
Web (commonly referred to simply as the
web) describes the global network of com-
puters linked by the INTERNET. In practice, the
term is generally treated as synonymous with
Internet or net, although some people make a
distinction between the World Wide Web (the
mass of documents and other material avail-
able by such electronic means) and the Inter-
net (the actual connections between these
sites). In electronic addresses World Wide
Web is abbreviated to www; in other contexts
it is usually abbreviated to WWW.

worn see WARN or WORN.

worship The single final p doubles in front
of most suffixes beginning with a vowel in
worthwhile

British English: • worshipped • worshipper • worshipping. American English retains the single p.
✓ Worshipful retains the single p.
See also SPELLING 1.

worthwhile or worth while? The traditional rule is that this expression is written as two words after a verb and as one word in front of a noun: • It is worth while spending a little more money. • a project that is worth while – a worthwhile project.
✓ Increasingly, however, the tendency is to write this expression as one word in all contexts.

would see OF; SHOULD or WOULD?; WOOD or WOULD?

wove, woven see WEADED, WOVE OR WOVEN?

wrack see RACK or WRACK?

wrapped see RAPT or WRAPPED?

wreak see REEK or WREAK?

wreathe or wreath? Wreathe is a noun describing a circular garland of flowers and foliage of the type commonly displayed at funerals: • There was a single wreath on the coffin. Wreath is a verb meaning ‘encircle’ or ‘twist’: • The mist wreathed around the trees.
✓ Wreath is pronounced [reater], while wreath is pronounced [reath].

wretch see RETCH or WRETCH?

wring The verb wring is followed by the preposition from or out of: • They tried in vain to wring the truth from [out of] her.
See also RING or WRING?

wright see RIGHT or WRITE?

write see RIGHT or WRITE?

wrought Wrought is an archaic form of the past tense and past participle of the verb work. It is still used adjectivally in such expression as wrought iron.
✓ Wrought is sometimes wrongly used as the past tense of wreak, meaning ‘inflict; cause’: • The hurricane wreaked [not wrought] havoc throughout the countryside. • She wreaked [not wrought] vengeance on the bullies.

WWW, WWW see WORLD WIDE WEB.

wysiwyg The term WYSIWYG, used in computing and pronounced [wiziwig], is an acronym for what you see is what you get: the display on the computer screen is an exact representation of what will appear on the printout. The term is sometimes spelt WYSIWYG or WYSIWIG: • Offering full WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get), including the enhancements such as bold, italics, inverse, tone and outlines (Daily Telegraph).
X

Xerox This word should be spelt *Xerox* if it is referring to the trademarked noun for a type of photographic copier or process. The verb, meaning 'copy on a Xerox machine', is spelt with a lower-case *x*.

X... is pronounced *[zeerox]*.

Xmas *Xmas*, an abbreviation for *Christmas*, is used particularly in commercial contexts and newspaper headlines. The *X* derives from the Greek *chi*, the initial letter of *Christos*, the Greek for *Christ*.

Some people, particularly Christians, find the word offensive and it is generally considered suitable only for informal writing. When reading the word aloud it is preferable to pronounce it as *Christmas*, and only actually to say *[eksmaʊ]* when this spelling is emphasized.

**X-ray or x-ray?** The noun is nearly always written with a capital *X*; the verb is written with a capital or lower-case letter. • *He had an X-ray*/*He was X-rayed* [or *x-rayed*] after the accident.
ye Ye is the archaic plural of thou, which subsequently became an equivalent of you. The use of ye (meaning 'the') to suggest antique, rustic charm, as in: • Ye Olde Teahoppe, was formerly fashionable, but in contemporary usage is best avoided except in ironic contexts. • This second sense of ye actually came about through medieval mistranscription of the rune letter than.

yes and no In discussing affirmative or negative expressions one has the option of writing, for example, either: • She said yes to the offer or: She said, Yes, to the offer. The latter carries more of an implication that the person actually used the word yes or no.

yet Yet has various meanings: up till now; so far: • It has not yet been decided, even: • a yet greater problem, in addition: • yet more presents; at some future time: • We'll do it yet, and 'nevertheless': • slow, yet sure.

you You is often used to mean 'people in general' in place of the slightly more formal one: • You certainly get a good meal at that restaurant. • You hold a hammer like this. • They [i.e. The authorities!] fine you on the spot if you've not got a ticket. • It's really embarrassing when you forget someone's name. • Dentists say you should clean your teeth at least twice a day. Although one is less frequently used than you it is sometimes better to use one to avoid possible confusion as to whether the speaker is talking personally or generally. It is also important to be consistent in the use of either you or one throughout a single piece of writing.

you know The expression you know is used by speakers who are not sure about what they have just said or who are not sure what to say next: • I just wondered... you know... if you might like to come with me to the theatre. The expression is frequently used with this function but is very widely disliked.

young For names of young of animals see table at ANIMALS.
your or you're? These two words may be confused. Your means 'belonging to you': • your house • your rights. You're is a contraction of you are: • Hurry up, you're going to be late!
• Note also the spelling of yours: • That's mine not yours; the spelling with an apostrophe, you're, is wrong.

yourself Careful speakers avoid using yourself as a replacement for you: • Would yourself care to sit here, next to me? • That's a question for yourself.

yuppie Yuppies, often spelt yuppies, is a North American coinage which came into frequent use in Britain in the mid-1980s. It stands for 'young urban (or upwardly mobile) professional' and is used to designate well-educated young adults, living in cities, working in well-paid occupations, and enjoying a fashionable way of life.
**zero** The digit 0 has a variety of names. 

*Nought* (see also *Naught* or *Nought*) and (less frequently) *zero* are the general terms for this digit: • *The number 1000 has three noughts* [or zeros]. • *You’ve missed a nought off the end — it should be two hundred thousand, not twenty thousand.* In scientific contexts, and for expressing temperatures, etc., *zero* is preferred: • *Water freezes at zero degrees Celsius.* *Zero* is also used in countdowns: • *five, four, three, two, one, zero.*

*When ‘spelling out’ a number, such as a telephone number or account number, the name of the letter O (pronounced like the word oh) is used in British English:* • *The dialling code for Liverpool is oh-one-five-one.*

In sport, the terms *love* and *nil* are used for a score of 0: • *four love in the final set.* • *At half-time the score was two nil.*

The plural of *zero* is *zeros* or *zeroes.* Either form is acceptable, but *zeros* is the more frequent, being preferred by many users.

**zeugma** This term denotes a figure of speech in which a word (usually a verb or adjective) applies to more than one other word in the sentence, often in different senses: • *She drove the car too fast and her instructor to despair.*

• *Zeugma* is pronounced [z̪uːgma] in British English and [zʊʊgma] in American English.

**zoology** This word, referring to the biological study of animals, has two pronunciations. The more frequent pronunciation is [zəʊəˈlɒdʒi], though careful users prefer [zɔʊəˈlɒdʒi].