

Common Mistakes in Academic Writing

I. Commonly Confused Words

- a. **Affect/effect:** ‘**A**ffect’ is the verb, while ‘**e**ffect’ is the noun.
 - Soft drinks can *affect* the health of children.
 - The *effect* of soft drinks on children’s health has been the subject of many studies.
- b. **Advice/advise:** ‘**A**dvice’ is the verb, and ‘**a**dvice’ is the noun.
 - The professor *advised* students to visit the writing centre.
 - Among the points of *advice* listed on the syllabus was visiting the writing centre.
- c. **Accept/except:** ‘**A**cccept’ is a verb that means ‘to receive something willingly’. ‘**E**xcept’ is a preposition that means ‘to exclude.’
 - The journal *accepted* his research paper.
 - During the revision process, journals can be flexible with matters of error, *except* plagiarism.
- d. **Which/witch:** ‘**W**hich’ is a pronoun used to refer to a person or a thing. ‘**W**itch’ is a noun that means ‘a female magician.’
 - Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, *which* is a tragedy, was first performed in 1611.
 - There are three *witches* in *Macbeth*.
- e. **Whether/weather:** ‘**W**hether’ is a conjunction used to introduce two alternative elements. ‘**W**eather’ is a noun that refers to atmosphere conditions.
 - Rainy and cool *weather* can be ideal for writing.
 - It is a writer’s decision *whether* to stay in to write or go out to socialize.
- f. **There/their:** ‘**t**here’ is an adverb that refers to a place, the opposite of here. ‘**T**heir’ is a possessive adjective that means ‘belongs to them.’
 - The books are crowding the table here, so put them on the shelf over *there*.
 - Students lined up to pick up *their* books from the book shelf.

II. Misuse of articles

- a. **Definite article ‘the’.** It is used to refer to specific or particular nouns.
 - *The* book you gave me is interesting.
- b. **Indefinite articles ‘a/an’.** They are used to modify non-specific or non-particular nouns.
 - ‘a’ precedes nouns that begin with consonants, e.g., ‘a garden.’
 - ‘an’ precedes nouns that begin with vowels, e.g., ‘an album.’
 - ‘a/an’ are **NEVER** used with **plurals**. So, ‘**a** great books’ is **wrong**.

III. Use of Non-academic Words and Symbols

<i>Non-Academic Usage</i>	<i>Academic Alternatives</i>
She got more sensitive with time. She got an award for her research.	<i>became</i> <i>received</i>
The book received a lot of criticism. The book inspired a lot of writers.	<i>a great deal</i> <i>many / several / a great number</i>
Students got better with practice.	<i>improved</i>
Using more than one punctuation mark like !!!! or ?!	Use one punctuation mark at a time.
Abbreviations or contractions like don't / won't	<i>Do not</i> <i>will not</i>
1, 2, 3, 4	Spell out numbers 1-9: <i>One, two, three, four ...</i>
Casual or online social network words like LOL, dude, dope ...	Avoid using casual or online social network words altogether