

Word endings (suffixes)**FINAL SILENT E**

Drop the final silent *e* when you add an ending that starts with a vowel.

imagine + -able = imaginable exercise + -ing = exercising

Generally, keep the final *e* if the ending starts with a consonant. Common exceptions include *argument*, *judgment*, *noticeable*, and *truly*.

force + -ful = forceful state + -ly = stately

FINAL Y

When adding an ending to a word that ends in a consonant plus *y*, change the *y* to an *i* in most cases.

try, tried busy, busily

Keep the *y* if it is part of a proper name or if the ending begins with *i*.

Kennedy, Kennedyesque dry, drying

FINAL CONSONANTS

When adding an ending beginning with a vowel to a word that ends with a vowel and a consonant, double the final consonant if the original word is one syllable or if the accent is on the same syllable in both the original and the new word.

stop, stopped begin, beginner refer, referral

Otherwise, do not double the final consonant.

bait, baiting start, started refer, reference

Plurals**ADDING -S OR -ES**

For most nouns, add *-s*. For words ending in *s*, *ch*, *sh*, *x*, or *z*, add *-es*.

pencil, pencils church, churches bus, buses

In general, add *-s* to nouns ending in *o* if the *o* is preceded by a vowel. Add *-es* if the *o* is preceded by a consonant.

rodeo, rodeos patio, patios potato, potatoes hero, heroes

For some nouns ending in *f* or *fe*, change *f* to *v*, and add *-s* or *-es*.

calf, calves

life, lives

hoof, hooves

For compound nouns written as separate or hyphenated words, make the most important part plural, whether or not it is the last part of the compound.

lieutenant governors

brothers-in-law

For plurals of numbers and words used as terms, see 41c.

Conventions of usage might be called the “good manners” of discourse. And just as manners vary from culture to culture and time to time, so do conventions of usage. Matters of usage, like other language choices you must make, depend on what your purpose is and on what is appropriate for a particular audience at a particular time.

a, an Use *a* with a word that begins with a consonant (*a book*), a consonant sound such as “y” or “w” (*a euphoric moment*, *a one-sided match*), or a sounded *h* (*a hemisphere*). Use *an* with a word that begins with a vowel (*an umbrella*), a vowel sound (*an X-ray*), or a silent *h* (*an honor*).

accept, except The verb *accept* means “receive” or “agree to.” *Except* is usually a preposition that means “aside from” or “excluding.” *All the plaintiffs except Mr. Kim decided to accept the settlement.*

advice, advise The noun *advice* means “opinion” or “suggestion”; the verb *advise* means “offer advice.” *Doctors advise everyone not to smoke, but many people ignore the advice.*

affect, effect As a verb, *affect* means “influence” or “move the emotions of”; as a noun, it means “emotions” or “feelings.” *Effect* is a noun meaning “result”; less commonly, it is a verb meaning “bring about.” *The storm affected a large area. Its effects included widespread power failures. The drug effected a major change in the patient’s affect.*

aggravate The formal meaning is “make worse.” *Having another mouth to feed aggravated their poverty.* In academic and professional writing, avoid using *aggravate* to mean “irritate” or “annoy.”

all ready, already *All ready* means “fully prepared.” *Already* means “previously.” *We were all ready for Lucy’s party when we learned that she had already left.*

all right, alright Avoid the spelling *alright*.

all together, altogether *All together* means “all in a group” or “gathered in one place.” *Altogether* means “completely” or “everything considered.” *When the board members were all together, their mutual distrust was altogether obvious.*

allude, elude *Allude* means “refer indirectly.” *Elude* means “avoid” or “escape from.” *The candidate did not even allude to her opponent. The suspect eluded the police for several days.*

allusion, illusion An *allusion* is an indirect reference. An *illusion* is a false or misleading appearance. *The speaker’s allusion to the Bible created an illusion of piety.*

a lot Avoid the spelling *alot*.

already See *all ready, already*.

alright See *all right, alright*.

altogether See *all together, altogether*.

among, between In referring to two things or people, use *between*. In referring to three or more, use *among*. *The relationship between the twins is different from that among the other three children.*

amount, number Use *amount* with quantities you cannot count; use *number* for quantities you can count. *A small number of volunteers cleared a large amount of brush.*

an See *a, an*.

and/or Avoid this term except in business or legal writing. Instead of *fat and/or protein*, write *fat, protein, or both*.

any body, anybody, any one, anyone *Anybody* and *anyone* are pronouns meaning "any person." *Anyone* [or *anybody*] *would enjoy this film*. *Any body* is an adjective modifying a noun. *Any body of water has its own ecology*. *Any one* is two adjectives or a pronoun modified by an adjective. *Customers could buy only two sale items at any one time*. *The winner could choose any one of the prizes*.

anyplace In academic and professional discourse, use *anywhere* instead.

anyway, anyways In writing, use *anyway*, not *anyways*.

apt, liable, likely *Likely to* means "probably will," and *apt to* means "inclines or tends to." In many instances, they are interchangeable. *Liable* often carries a more negative sense and is also a legal term meaning "obligated" or "responsible."

as Avoid sentences in which it is not clear if *as* means "when" or "because." For example, does *Carl left town as his father was arriving* mean "at the same time as his father was arriving" or "because his father was arriving"?

as, as if, like In academic and professional writing, use *as* or *as if* instead of *like* to introduce a clause. *The dog howled as if [not like] it were in pain*. *She did as [not like] I suggested*.

assure, ensure, insure *Assure* means "convince" or "promise"; its direct object is usually a person or persons. *She assured voters she would not raise taxes*. *Ensure* and *insure* both mean "make certain," but *insure* usually refers specifically to protection against financial loss. *When the city rationed water to ensure that the supply would last, the Browns could no longer afford to insure their car-wash business*.

as to Do not use *as to* as a substitute for *about*. *Karen was unsure about [not as to] Bruce's intentions*.

at, where See *where*.

awhile, a while Always use *a while* after a preposition such as *for*, *in*, or *after*. *We drove awhile and then stopped for a while*.

bad, badly Use *bad* after a linking verb such as *be*, *feel*, or *seem*. Use *badly* to modify an action verb, an adjective, or another verb. *The hostess felt bad because the dinner was badly prepared*.

bare, bear Use *bare* to mean “uncovered” and *bear* to refer to the animal or to mean “carry” or “endure”: *The walls were bare. The emptiness was hard to bear.*

because of, due to Use *due to* when the effect, stated as a noun, appears before the verb *be*. *His illness was due to malnutrition.* (*Illness*, a noun, is the effect.) Use *because of* when the effect is stated as a clause. *He was sick because of malnutrition.* (*He was sick*, a clause, is the effect.)

being as, being that In academic or professional writing, use *because* or *since* instead of these expressions. *Because [not being as] Romeo killed Tybalt, he was banished to Padua.*

beside, besides *Beside* is a preposition meaning “next to.” *Besides* can be a preposition meaning “other than” or an adverb meaning “in addition.” *No one besides Francesca would sit beside him.*

between See *among*, *between*.

brake, break *Brake* means “to stop” and also refers to a stopping mechanism: *Check the brakes.* *Break* means “fracture” or an interruption: *The coffee break was too short.*

breath, breathe *Breath* is a noun; *breathe*, a verb. “Breathe,” said the nurse, so June took a deep breath.

bring, take Use *bring* when an object is moved from a farther to a nearer place; use *take* when the opposite is true. *Take the box to the post office; bring back my mail.*

but, yet Do not use these words together. *He is strong but [not but yet] gentle.*

but that, but what Avoid using these as substitutes for *that* in expressions of doubt. *Hercule Poirot never doubted that [not but that] he would solve the case.*

can, may *Can* refers to ability and *may* to possibility or permission. *Since I can ski the slalom well, I may win the race.*

can't hardly *Hardly* has a negative meaning; therefore, *can't hardly* is a double negative. This expression is commonly used in some varieties of English but is not used in academic English. *Tim can [not can't] hardly wait.*

can't help but This expression is redundant. Use *I can't help going* rather than *I can't help but go*.

cancel, censor *Cancel* means “remove that which is considered offensive.” *Censor* means “formally reprimand.” *The newspaper censored stories that offended advertisers. The legislature censured the official for misconduct.*

compare to, compare with *Compare to* means “regard as similar.” *Jamie compared the loss to a kick in the head. Compare with* means “examine to find differences or similarities.” *Compare Tim Burton's films with David Lynch's.*

complement, compliment *Complement* means “go well with.” *Compliment* means “praise.” *Guests complimented her on how her earrings complemented her gown.*

comprise, compose *Comprise* means “contain.” *Compose* means “make up.” *The class comprises twenty students. Twenty students compose the class.*

conscience, conscious *Conscience* means “a sense of right and wrong.” *Conscious* means “awake” or “aware.” *Lisa was conscious of a guilty conscience.*

consensus of opinion Use *consensus* instead of this redundant phrase. *The family consensus was to sell the old house.*

consequently, subsequently *Consequently* means “as a result”; *subsequently* means “then.” *He quit, and subsequently his wife lost her job; consequently, they had to sell their house.*

continual, continuous *Continual* means “repeated at regular or frequent intervals.” *Continuous* means “continuing or connected without a break.” *The damage done by continuous erosion was increased by the continual storms.*

could of *Have, not of, should follow could, would, should, or might. We could have [not of] invited them.*

criteria, criterion *Criterion* means “standard of judgment” or “necessary qualification.” *Criteria* is the plural form. *Image is the wrong criterion for choosing a president.*

data *Data* is the plural form of the Latin word *datum*, meaning “fact.” Although *data* is used informally as either singular or plural, in academic or professional writing, treat *data* as plural. *These data indicate that fewer people are smoking.*

different from, different than *Different from* is generally preferred in academic and professional writing, although both phrases are widely used. *Her lab results were no different from [not than] his.*

discreet, discrete *Discreet* means “tactful” or “prudent.” *Discrete* means “separate” or “distinct.” *The leader’s discreet efforts kept all the discrete factions unified.*

disinterested, uninterested *Disinterested* means “unbiased.” *Uninterested* means “indifferent.” *Finding disinterested jurors was difficult. She was uninterested in the verdict.*

distinct, distinctive *Distinct* means “separate” or “well defined.” *Distinctive* means “characteristic.” *Germany includes many distinct regions, each with a distinctive accent.*

doesn’t, don’t *Doesn’t* is the contraction for *does not*. Use it with *he, she, it*, and singular nouns. *Don’t* stands for *do not*; use it with *I, you, we, they*, and plural nouns.

due to See *because of, due to*.

each other, one another Use *each other* in sentences involving two subjects and *one another* in sentences involving more than two.

effect See *affect, effect*.

elicit, illicit The verb *elicit* means “draw out.” The adjective *illicit* means “illegal.” *The police elicited from the criminal the names of others involved in illicit activities.*

elude See *allude, elude*.

emigrate from, immigrate to *Emigrate from* means “move away from one’s country.” *Immigrate to* means “move to another country.” *We emigrated from Norway in 1999. We immigrated to the United States.*

ensure See *assure, ensure, insure*.

enthused, enthusiastic Use *enthusiastic* rather than *enthused* in academic and professional writing.

equally as good Replace this redundant phrase with *equally good* or *as good*.

every day, everyday *Everyday* is an adjective meaning “ordinary.” *Every day* is an adjective and a noun, meaning “each day.” *I wore everyday clothes almost every day.*

every one, everyone *Everyone* is a pronoun. *Every one* is an adjective and a pronoun, referring to each member of a group. *Because he began after everyone else, David could not finish every one of the problems.*

except See *accept, except*.

explicit, implicit *Explicit* means “directly or openly expressed.” *Implicit* means “indirectly expressed or implied.” *The explicit message of the ad urged consumers to buy the product, while the implicit message promised popularity if they did so.*

farther, further *Farther* refers to physical distance. *How much farther is it to Munich? Further* refers to time or degree. *I want to avoid further delays.*

fewer, less Use *fewer* with nouns that can be counted. Use *less* with general amounts that you cannot count. *The world needs fewer bombs and less hostility.*

finalize *Finalize* is a pretentious way of saying “end” or “make final.” *We closed [not finalized] the deal.*

firstly, secondly, etc. *First, second, etc.*, are more common in U.S. English.

flaunt, flout *Flaunt* means to “show off.” *Flout* means to “mock” or “scorn.” *The drug dealers flouted authority by flaunting their wealth.*

former, latter *Former* refers to the first and *latter* to the second of two things previously mentioned. *Kathy and Anna are athletes; the former plays tennis, and the latter runs.*

further See *farther, further*.

good, well *Good* is an adjective and should not be used as a substitute for the adverb *well*. *Gabriel is a good host who cooks well.*

good and *Good and* is colloquial for “very”; avoid it in academic and professional writing.

hanged, hung *Hanged* refers to executions; *hung* is used for all other meanings.

hardly See *can't hardly*.

herself, himself, myself, yourself Do not use these reflexive pronouns as subjects or as objects unless they are necessary. *Jane and I [not myself] agree. They invited John and me [not myself].*

he/she, his/her Better solutions for avoiding sexist language are to write out *he* or *she*, to eliminate pronouns entirely, or to make the subject plural. Instead of writing *Everyone should carry his/her driver's license*, try *Drivers should carry their licenses* or *People should carry their driver's licenses*.

himself See *herself, himself, myself, yourself*.

hissel Use *himself* instead in academic or professional writing.

hopefully *Hopefully* is often misused to mean “it is hoped,” but its correct meaning is “with hope.” *Sam watched the roulette wheel hopefully [not Hopefully, Sam will win].*

hung See *hanged, hung*.

illicit See *elicit, illicit*.

illusion See *allusion, illusion*.

immigrate to See *emigrate from, immigrate to*.

impact Avoid the colloquial use of *impact* or *impact on* as a verb meaning “affect.” *Population control may reduce [not impact] world hunger.*

implicit See *explicit, implicit*.

imply, infer To *imply* is to suggest indirectly. To *infer* is to guess or conclude on the basis of an indirect suggestion. *The note implied they were planning a small wedding; we inferred we would not be invited.*

inside of, outside of Use *inside* and *outside* instead. *The class regularly met outside [not outside of] the building.*

insure See *assure, ensure, insure*.

interact, interface *Interact* is a vague word meaning “do something that somehow involves another person.” *Interface* is computer jargon; when used as a verb, it means “discuss” or “communicate.” Avoid both verbs in academic and professional writing.

irregardless, regardless *Irregardless* is a double negative. Use *regardless*.

is when, is where These vague expressions are often incorrectly used in definitions. *Schizophrenia is a psychotic condition in which [not is when or is where] a person withdraws from reality.*

its, it's *Its* is the possessive form of *it*. *It's* is a contraction for *it is* or *it has*. *It's important to observe the rat before it eats its meal.*

kind, sort, type These singular nouns should be modified with *this* or *that*, not *these* or *those*, and followed by other singular nouns, not plural nouns. *Wear this kind of dress [not those kind of dresses].*

kind of, sort of Avoid these colloquialisms. *Amy was somewhat [not kind of] tired.*

know, no Use *know* to mean “understand.” *No* is the opposite of *yes*.

later, latter *Later* means “after some time.” *Latter* refers to the second of two items named. *Juan and Chad won all their early matches, but the latter was injured later in the season.*

latter See *former, latter* and *later, latter*.

lay, lie *Lay* means “place” or “put.” Its main forms are *lay, laid, laid*. It generally has a direct object, specifying what has been placed. *She laid her books on the desk.* *Lie* means “recline” or “be positioned” and does not take a direct object. Its main forms are *lie, lay, lain*. *She lay awake until two.*

leave, let *Leave* means “go away.” *Let* means “allow.” *Leave alone* and *let alone* are interchangeable. *Let me leave now, and leave [or let] me alone from now on!*

lend, loan In academic and professional writing, do not use *loan* as a verb; use *lend* instead. *Please lend me your pen so that I may fill out this application for a loan.*

less See *fewer, less*.

let See *leave, let*.

liable See *apt, liable, likely*.

lie See *lay, lie*.

like See *as, as if, like*.

likely See *apt, liable, likely*.

literally *Literally* means “actually” or “exactly as stated.” Use it to stress the truth of a statement that might otherwise be understood as figurative. Do not use *literally* as an intensifier in a figurative statement. *Mirna was literally at the edge of her seat* may be accurate, but *Mirna is so hungry that she could literally eat a horse* is not.

loan See *lend, loan*.

loose, lose *Lose* is a verb meaning “misplace.” *Loose* is an adjective that means “not securely attached.” *Sew on that loose button before you lose it*.

lots, lots of Avoid these informal expressions meaning “much” or “many” in academic or professional discourse.

man, mankind Replace these terms with *people, humans, humankind, men and women*, or similar wording.

may See *can, may*.

may be, maybe *May be* is a verb phrase. *Maybe* is an adverb that means “perhaps.” *He may be the head of the organization, but maybe someone else would handle a crisis better*.

media *Media* is the plural form of the noun *medium* and takes a plural verb. *The media are [not is] obsessed with scandals*.

might of See *could of*.

moral, morale A *moral* is a succinct lesson. *The moral of the story is that generosity is rewarded*. *Morale* means “spirit” or “mood.” *Office morale was low*.

myself See *herself, himself, myself, yourself*.

no See *know, no*.

nor, or Use *either* with *or* and *neither* with *nor*.

number See *amount, number*.

off, of Use *off* without *of*. *The spaghetti slipped off [not off of] the plate*.

OK, O.K., okay All are acceptable spellings, but avoid the term in academic and professional discourse.

on account of Use this substitute for *because of* sparingly or not at all.

one another See *each other, one another*.

or See *nor, or*.

outside of See *inside of, outside of*.

owing to the fact that Avoid this and other wordy expressions for *because*.

passed, past Use *passed* to mean “went by” or “received a passing grade”: *The marching band passed the reviewing stand*. Use *past* to refer to a time before the present: *Historians study the past*.

per Use the Latin *per* only in standard technical phrases such as *miles per hour*. Otherwise, find English equivalents. *As mentioned in [not As per] the latest report, the country's average food consumption each day [not per day] is only 2,000 calories.*

percent, percentage Use *percent* with a specific number; use *percentage* with an adjective such as *large* or *small*. *Last year, 80 percent of the members were female. A large percentage of the members are women.*

plenty *Plenty* means “enough” or “a great abundance.” *They told us America was a land of plenty.* Colloquially, it is used to mean “very,” a usage you should avoid in academic and professional writing. *He was very [not plenty] tired.*

plus *Plus* means “in addition to.” *Your salary plus mine will cover our expenses.* Do not use *plus* to mean “besides” or “moreover.” *That dress does not fit me. Besides [not Plus], it is the wrong color.*

precede, proceed *Precede* means “come before”; *proceed* means “go forward.” *Despite the storm that preceded the ceremony, the wedding proceeded on schedule.*

pretty Avoid using *pretty* as a substitute for “rather,” “somewhat,” or “quite.” *Bill was quite [not pretty] disagreeable.*

principal, principle When used as a noun, *principal* refers to a head official or an amount of money; when used as an adjective, it means “most significant.” *Principle* means “fundamental law or belief.” *Albert went to the principal and defended himself with the principle of free speech.*

proceed See *precede, proceed*.

quotation, quote *Quote* is a verb, and *quotation* is a noun. *He quoted the president, and the quotation [not quote] was preserved in history books.*

raise, rise *Raise* means “lift” or “move upward.” (Referring to children, it means “bring up.”) It takes a direct object; someone raises something. *The guests raised their glasses to toast. Rise* means “go upward.” It does not take a direct object; something rises by itself. *She saw the steam rise from the pan.*

rarely ever Use *rarely* by itself, or use *hardly ever*. *When we were poor, we rarely went to the movies.*

real, really *Real* is an adjective, and *really* is an adverb. Do not substitute *real* for *really*. In academic and professional writing, do not use *real* or *really* to mean “very.” *The old man walked very [not real or really] slowly.*

reason is because Use either *the reason is that* or *because* — not both. *The reason the copier stopped is that [not is because] the paper jammed.*

reason why This expression is redundant. *The reason [not reason why] this book is short is market demand.*

regardless See *irregardless, regardless*.

respectfully, respectfully *Respectfully* means “with respect.” *Respectively* means “in the order given.” *Karen and David are, respectively, a juggler and an acrobat. The children treated their grandparents respectfully.*

rise See *raise, rise*.

set, sit *Set* usually means “put” or “place” and takes a direct object. *Sit* refers to taking a seat and does not take an object. *Set your cup on the table, and sit down.*

should of See *could of*.

since Be careful not to use *since* ambiguously. In *Since I broke my leg, I've stayed home*, the word *since* might be understood to mean either "because" or "ever since."

sit See *set, sit*.

so In academic and professional writing, avoid using *so* alone to mean "very." Instead, follow *so* with *that* to show how the intensified condition leads to a result. *Aaron was so tired that he fell asleep at the wheel.*

someplace Use *somewhere* instead in academic and professional writing.

some time, sometime, sometimes *Some time* refers to a length of time. *Please leave me some time to dress.* *Sometime* means "at some indefinite later time." *Sometime I will take you to London.* *Sometimes* means "occasionally." *Sometimes I eat sushi.*

sort See *kind, sort, type*.

sort of See *kind of, sort of*.

stationary, stationery *Stationary* means "standing still"; *stationery* means "writing paper." *When the bus was stationary, Pat took out stationery and wrote a note.*

subsequently See *consequently, subsequently*.