



What are some of your favorite holidays or celebrations and what are some of the customs, foods, and symbols associated with each?

GOALS

- Learn why mastering word choice is important in writing
- Understand five problems writers commonly encounter with word choice
- Choose words accurately in exercises and writing assignments

LEARN WHAT THE ERROR IS

Errors in Word Choice

A **word-choice** error is one in which the wrong word has been used in a sentence. For example, in the sentence *Even though she spoke very little English when she first arrived in the United States, my mother did not abundant her dream of being a bookkeeper*, the word *abundant* should be *abandon*. The editing symbol for a word-choice error is *wc*.

Word-choice errors, although usually local (less serious) and affecting only part of a sentence, can become global (more serious) when they occur frequently or affect a reader's ability to understand a significant portion of a text.

To convey exact meaning, the writer must master word choice. When a writer uses a word incorrectly, the reader must then either guess at the meaning or skip the word altogether. Thus, the reader, instead of the writer, is supplying meaning that may or may not be correct. Such work tires the reader and can cause him or her to lose interest in a piece of writing.

It is equally important that writers expand their vocabulary so that they can choose effective words to convey exact meaning. See Section 3, "Expand Your Vocabulary," page 320 for strategies to help you expand your vocabulary.

Suggestions for Reducing Errors

- Remember that word choice is governed not by rules but by usage. For this reason, you will sometimes need to ask an instructor or a tutor if you have used a word correctly.
- Memorize how certain words are used, particularly words that you use frequently in your major fields of interest or on the job.
- Become familiar with collocations, words that are commonly used together, such as *mutual trust*, *breaking news*, or *crucial development*. Many learner's dictionaries now include such word partnerships.
- Use a learner's dictionary that shows how a word is used in a sample sentence. When using a thesaurus, choose words carefully from it, making sure that each word you have selected fits the sentence you have written.
- Avoid, as much as possible, translating from your language into English since direct translation often results in word-choice errors.

Check Your Understanding

Write answers to the following questions. Share your answers with another student.

1. Why can word-choice errors become global (more serious) errors?
2. What are two strategies you can employ to avoid errors in word choice?

GRAMMAR JOURNAL ENTRY 13 WORD CHOICE

Respond to the following in your grammar journal.

1. What, in your opinion, are two good strategies for you to use to expand your vocabulary in English? For some ideas, you might want to look at Section 3, Part A, "Expand Your Vocabulary on page 320."
2. Write a list of five words you have had difficulty with in the past but have now mastered. Then, write a list of five words that you are currently having difficulty with. Look up each word in a dictionary that has example sentences. Write your own sample sentences and check them with your teacher or a writing tutor.

UNDERSTAND COMMON PROBLEMS

This section presents five problems that writers commonly encounter with word choice. First, take the pre-test to see what you already know about word choice. When you finish, check your answers on page 354. Then, carefully study each problem and the examples that illustrate it. Pay particular attention to those problems that correspond to the pre-test questions you had difficulty with. Remember that becoming aware of the types of errors you most often make with word choice will increase your chances of avoiding these errors in your writing.

Prepositions are covered in Unit 15, "Prepositions," and conjunctions are covered in Unit 9, "Connecting Words," as well as in Unit 6, "Relative, Adverbial and Noun Clauses."

Pre-test

What Do You Already Know?

Test your ability to recognize and correct errors with word choice.

- A** Correct the marked word-choice errors. These are examples of the five common problems that are presented in this unit.

Problem 1 ^{we} Intuition fees will be increased 40 percent next year.

Problem 2 The driver was unconscious, so the police could only ^{we} spectaculate about what had caused the accident.

Problem 3 The ^{we} rules expect that library books will be returned on time.

Problem 4 Most teachers ^{we} discuss about the importance of attending class.

Problem 5 His students all think Dr. Stern is an ^{we} awesome teacher.

B Underline and correct the one error in each of the following sentences. (The errors are not in any particular order.)

1. Before going to the laboratory, we have to read an article online and do some other stuff.
2. Being around leaders in a field can exhilarate a young person's attitude.
3. Many first-year students find that eating in the student cafeteria is very convient.
4. Good coaches emphasize on the importance of good sportsmanship.
5. From my perceptive, a trip to Europe is very expensive.

Five Common Problems

Problem 1

A wrong word has been used in a sentence. Sometimes the incorrect word may sound like the target word, but it is not correct.

Incorrect: The essay we just read is an ^{we} exception from a longer work.

Correct: The essay we just read is an excerpt from a longer work.

Incorrect: Adults have been complaining about the younger generation for ^{we} decays.

Correct: Adults have been complaining about the younger generation for decades.

Incorrect: My limited vocabulary ^{we} bounds my friendships at a superficial level.

Correct: My limited vocabulary keeps my friendships at a superficial level.

Incorrect: A serious student is not easily ^{we} allured away from studying.

Correct: A serious student is not easily lured away from studying.

Incorrect: Most first-year students eat their dinner in the dining ^{we} columns.

Correct: Most first-year students eat their dinner in the dining commons.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Be aware that you might often confuse words that sound somewhat alike when you write them if you have learned English primarily through listening to it. The more you read, the less likely you will encounter this problem because you will see the word used in written form in the proper context.

Problem 2

A word has been used that does not exist in English.

Incorrect: The article was fairly easy to read and ^{we} comprehenced.

Correct: The article was fairly easy to read and comprehend.

Incorrect: Being a student is ^{we} literarily a full-time job.

Correct: Being a student is literally a full-time job.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Keep in mind that the spell-check on your computer can sometimes help, as it will indicate if a word is unknown. Some spell-checks also give suggested words that may help you find the correct word.

Problem 3

A verb has been used that does not fit the subject and/or predicate.

Incorrect: ^{we} Reading collaborated in opening Andrew's mind to a better understanding of the lives of the people around him.
(Reading cannot collaborate.)

Correct: Reading helped Andrew better understand the lives of the people around him.

Incorrect: Reiko's mother ^{we} suffered a struggle to balance work and family.
(A struggle cannot be suffered.)

Correct: Reiko's mother suffered while struggling to balance work and family.

Note: This serious error in word choice affects the subject and/or predicate of the sentence and affects meaning, making it a global error. This error is also covered in English writing textbooks and handbooks, where it may be referred to as a predication error.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Make sure that the subject or predicate and the verb fit together; that is, you need to verify that the verb you have chosen can do the action required by the subject or predicate. You may need to change the verb, rewrite the subject or predicate, or rewrite the whole sentence.

Problem 4

Two closely-related expressions have been confused.

Incorrect: She did not just as exactly^{we} know how to reach the airport.

Incorrect: She did not know exactly as how^{we} to reach the airport.

Correct: She did not know just how to reach the airport.

Correct: She did not know exactly how to reach the airport.

Incorrect: Jerome's lack of sleep will directly effect on^{we} his concentration.

Correct: Jerome's lack of sleep will have a direct effect on his concentration.

Correct: Jerome's lack of sleep will directly affect his concentration.

Incorrect: Jack is seeking for^{we} the answer on the Internet.

Correct: Jack is looking for the answer on the Internet.

Correct: Jack is seeking the answer on the Internet.

Incorrect: My brother is a person with a lot of smarts^{we}.

Correct: My brother is an intelligent person.

Incorrect: Many people feel that the test for a driver's license is a tough exam^{we}.

Correct: Many people feel that the test for a driver's license is a difficult exam.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Be aware that in speaking, we frequently use informal words that are not acceptable in formal writing. Also, remember that shortcuts like "r" for "are" and "u" for "you" are not used in formal writing.

Problem 5

An informal word or expression has been used in formal writing.

Note: There is no Review Grammar Solutions section in this unit.

IMPROVE YOUR WRITING STYLE

COLLOCATIONS

Be aware that certain words are commonly used together, like the adjective and noun, high expectations, or the verb and noun, set a goal. If another word is used, as in the sentence My parents have powerful expectations for me, it will sound unnatural to fluent speakers even though they will understand the general meaning. Words that are commonly used together are called collocations. Many learner's dictionaries as well as ESL textbooks include notes about collocations.

USING ONE-WORD VERBS

In written academic English, the writer needs to maintain a formal tone. One way to achieve such formality is to replace a two- or three-word verb (called a phrasal verb) with a one-word verb.

Examples:

This paper will talk about the effects of wildfires on birds.

This paper will discuss the effects of wildfires on birds.

Students will look into methods of recycling batteries.

Students will investigate methods of recycling batteries.

Good writers strive for the appropriate level of formality to suit their audience and purpose. For example, academic papers and professional reports are generally formal while e-mail and text messages tend to be relatively informal.

USING PRECISE VERBS

To make your writing as precise as possible, use a specific verb in place of a more general verb. In the examples below, the verb goes from general to very specific.

Examples:

The captain threw away nonessential items in order to lighten the ship's load.

The captain discarded nonessential items in order to lighten the ship's load.

The captain jettisoned nonessential items in order to lighten the ship's load.

The server is talking about the fish special.

The server is promoting the fish special.

The server is touting the fish special.

IMPROVE YOUR WRITING STYLE (CONT.)

The little girl was holding her balloon when it broke.

The little girl was holding her balloon when it popped.

Although in English an exact verb can be found to describe most actions, it takes time and exposure to the language to be able to choose words accurately.

USING SPECIFIC NOUNS

To make your writing as precise as possible, use a specific noun in place of a more general noun.

Examples:

The doctor needed 25 people for her study. (general)

The doctor needed 25 individuals for her study. (more specific)

The doctor needed 25 subjects for her study. (more specific)

PRACTICE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

EXERCISE 1

Directions: For each sentence, underline and correct the word-choice error.

1. Because she did not know anyone there, Leah felt very ^{uncomfortable} discomfortable at the party.
2. Arturo called to say he would be late; in the meanwhile, I read a book.
3. My parents, who immigrated from China two years ago, are inliterated in English.
4. I once was in a math class where everyone was motivated to conquer the best test score.
5. When Samir cannot answer in class, he does not feel cool.
6. Jennifer's bad grade on her final exam in French unabled her from passing the course.

7. I became so courteous that I decided to investigate the noise.
8. Students are also putting their part to keep the school clean by not littering.
9. At first, I was speakless in class because of my English.
10. After she had been studying English for six weeks, Madeleine expected to know everything, but in replacement she found she had just begun to learn.

EXERCISE 2

Directions: This student paragraph has six word-choice errors. With a classmate, read the paragraph and make the corrections, deciding on the correct word. If you are unsure, check the word in a learner's dictionary. The first one has been done for you.

When I was a senior in high school, I dreamed about being a college student and often wondered what college would ^{*be like*} appear. I also wondered about how much difference there would be between college and high school, particularly in class size. I assisted to a big-city high school, which was crowded; each class had an enrollment of 40 students. Therefore, when I sent in my application for college, I hoped that classes in college would be small. However, here at college, especially in chemistry and economics classes, the lecture halls are crowding over. For instance, my chemistry class has more than 300 students in it and some of them cannot get a seat when they come late. Some students stand in the back, and others sit in the alleys. Unfortunately, when a class is very crowded, I cannot focus on what the teacher is emphasizing on. Therefore, I do not feel satisfied with what I am learning. Unfortunately, my wish that classes would be small in college has not been realized.

EXERCISE 3

Directions: Replace each underlined phrasal (two- or three-word) verb with a more formal, one-word verb from the list given. Be sure to use the appropriate tense of the verb.

investigate	summarize	find	mature
encounter	increase	determine	collapse

1. During the baseball game, the rain-damaged roof of the stadium ^{*collapsed*} fell in, injuring several spectators.
2. When certain weather conditions occur, smog builds up in the Los Angeles area.
3. The little Airedale puppy has grown up into a prize-winning champion.
4. When the rain stops, the police are going to look into the crime and take fingerprints.
5. At the next class meeting, the cancer specialist will briefly tell about his research on preventing skin cancer.
6. I am in the process of talking to a number of professors to figure out what research topic I might be interested in.
7. Mathematicians have come up with a new way to solve the equation.
8. We never expected to run into these types of problems.

EXERCISE 4

Directions: Read a short news article and underline any words that are new to you. Then, check the meaning of each new word in a dictionary, preferably a learner's dictionary. Finally, write a sentence using the new word.

Post-test

What Do You Know Now?

A Complete each sentence by underlining the correct word.

1. When we are at the beach, it is a lot of fun to swim around and (recover/uncover) the mystery of the ocean.
2. My friends like to go hiking on a weekly (base/basis).
3. When Tracy moved to Chicago last fall, at first she felt homesick and (unsettled/unpeaceful).
4. We are usually in a good mood outdoors because all the fresh air and beautiful scenery are refreshing to our (spirits/heads).
5. It is (obvious/easy) to find evidence in our daily life of why we gain weight.
6. We have plenty of (stuff/assignments) to complete before the winter break starts.
7. People usually prefer to (watch/see) television when sitting on a comfortable sofa.
8. When I visited the (desert/dessert), I was surprised to see all the flowers that had come out after the spring rains.
9. For most people, giving a speech is not difficult if they have a variety of points to (talk/say) about.
10. The presence of friends and acquaintances at a party (decorates/enriches) one's experience.

B Replace each underlined two-word verb with a more formal, one-word verb from the list given.

collect submit establish determine dedicate

1. The students can pick up their graded papers today from the teaching assistant's office.
2. We are still trying to figure out where to have the party.
3. Can we turn in our papers next Thursday instead of Monday?

4. Many students do not want to put in time to doing meaningless homework.
5. My brother-in-law set himself up as a lawyer 20 years ago and has been very successful as a defense attorney.

C Correct the seven underlined errors with word choice.

Our happiness as children is related to the environment that is created for us buy our parents. There are parents who do not let kids feel anything in the kitchen, for example; they have decided the surroundings are too dangerous for the children to explore. However, during my childhood, my mom let me play with anything I wanted to handle. I collected stones, caught frogs, chased rabbits, and fed turtles. A couple of times I was pained, but I learned how to avoid getting hurt. I also helped my mother cook and do housework. Although I was a pest when I was helping, I gained knowledge and learned how to survive independently. I had a wonderful childhood, and today I can laugh with my mother for hours when we talk about some brainless mistakes I made. Young people who are not allowed or encouraged to explore their worlds freely are at a disadvantage: there is no freedom and no fun for these kids.

APPLY WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED TO WRITING

Select a writing topic and follow the steps in Appendix A on page 337.

Topic 1:

Choose a holiday or celebration that is important in your culture or that you particularly enjoy. Describe this holiday or celebration, giving details on the customs associated with it and showing why you enjoy it or why it is important. Comment on whether there are any parts of the holiday or celebration that you do not like.

Topic 2:

Think of several strategies that you could use to improve your English skills. Then, write about the two or three strategies you think would help you the most, indicating how and why they would work for you.

Topic 3:

Interview at least two people and find out about some interesting places they like to visit or businesses they like to frequent. Write a report on what you found out, including what the places are, what people can do or see at each, and why the people you interviewed like these places. Conclude by saying whether or not you, personally, would like to go to these places.

