

Grammar Cheat Sheet

Affect / effect. The verb “affect” describes something that produces a change in another thing: Being tardy *affects* your performance review. An “effect” is a change that has occurred in something: Being tardy was an *effect* of her procrastination.

A lot. It’s always two words.

Alright / all right. The proper spelling is “all right.”

Alternately / alternatively. The former means that turns are being taken; the latter means that more than one option is available.

Between / among. “Between” refers to two (or sometimes more) things that are clearly separated, and the word “among” refers to things that are part of a group or mass of objects that is more difficult to count.

Between you and me / between you and I. “Between you and I” sounds formal and proper, but “between you and me” is correct because it’s the object of the preposition “between.”

Compliment / complement. Something that “complements” something else completes it, enhances it or makes it perfect. A “compliment” is an expression of praise.

Continual / continuous. Continual things are chronic and may come and go, start and stop: Their *continual* meetings really slow things down. Continuous things never stop, are never-ending: The flow of information to the website will be *continuous*.

Elicit / illicit. “Elicit” means to draw a response, while “illicit” means forbidden.

Everyday / every day. “Everyday” is an adjective that describes something common or ordinary: Paper jams are an *everyday* occurrence with this copier. “Every day” means each day: We come to work *every day* that the weather allows.

Farther / further. “Farther” is used more to refer to physical distances, while “further” is used more to refer to time, frequency and figurative distances, as in: We’ll discuss this *further*, or, *Further* efforts seem necessary.

i.e. / e.g. These Latin abbreviations are often misused: “i.e.” stands for “id est” (that is), “e.g.” stands for “exempli gratia” (for example).

Into / In to. “Into” indicates movement (Daryl moved *into* his new cubicle today; I put my burrito *into* the microwave) and usually answers the question, “Where?”

It’s / its. “It’s” is a contraction for “it is.” “Its” is possessive.

Less / fewer. Use “fewer” for things that are quantifiable, like “fewer trips to the cafeteria” or “fewer problems.” Use “less” for things that aren’t quantifiable, like “less hassle” and “less worrying.”

Lie / lay. They’re not interchangeable. I “lie down” right now and “lay down” last night. However, if there’s an object involved, it’s “lay” and “laid.” *Example:* He *laid* the spreadsheet before his boss.

Loose / lose. “Loose” is the opposite of “tight.” When you “lose” something, it’s missing.

More / most importantly. The “ly” is almost always incorrect and unnecessary. You can just say “more important” or “most important.”

None. It is always singular, never plural. *Example:* None of the admins is as efficient as Joy.

Refute / rebut. To refute is to disprove something, while to rebut is to simply disagree.

That / who. “That” refers to a thing. “Who” refers to a person.

Then / than. “Then” describes a sequence of events: I went to work, *then* I went to the game. “Than” is a matter of comparison: I’d rather eat chocolate *than* eat Twizzlers.

Their / there / they’re. “Their” is used to show possession. “There” is a place. “They’re” is the contraction of “they are.”

Uninterested / disinterested. The former means someone is actively tuning out; the latter means someone couldn’t really care either way.

Who’s / whose. “Who’s” is a contraction of “who is.” Reread your sentence, and if “who is” doesn’t make sense, you need to use “whose.”

You’re / your. “You’re” is a contraction for “you are.” “Your” is possessive.

The Redundancy Trash Can

Every time you catch yourself using one of these redundancies, cross it out. If they’re all crossed out before the new year, you know what to work on *next* year ...

9 a.m. in the morning Protest against Completely eliminate Over-exaggerate Past experience
Civil lawsuit Final outcome Closed fist Plan ahead Direct confrontation Set a new record
Added bonus Postpone until later At the present time Difficult dilemma Invited guests
Written down Unexpected surprise Repeat again Consensus of opinion Spell out in detail