

Frequently Misused Words

The meaning and spelling of the following word pairs are commonly confused.

Affect/Effect

Affect – to influence, to change

An organization's profitability can affect whether employees receive raises.

Effect – (noun) impression, results

(verb) to cause

Global warming is having an increasingly strong effect on our everyday lives.

It has effected a change in the way we view our future.

Among/Between

Among – used for more than two

He divided the money among his three sons.

Between – used in connection with two persons or things

He divided the money between his two sons.

Continual/Continuous

Continual – action that occurs with pauses and intermissions

The computer continually breaks down.

Continuous – action that occurs without pauses

The roar of the waterfall was continuous.

Disinterested/Uninterested

Disinterested – impartial, showing no preferences or prejudice

To serve on a jury, you must be a disinterested party.

Uninterested – bored or lacking interest

He was uninterested and took no part in the meeting.

Eager/Anxious

Eager – fervent, enthusiastic

I am eager for news about my job possibility.

Anxious – full of anxiety or worry caused by apprehension
Her co-workers were anxious about her poor health.

Farther/Further

Farther – refers to physical distance
We will drive no farther tonight.

Further – refers to degree or extent
Let's pursue this argument no further.

Imply/Infer

Imply – to throw out a hint or suggestion
She implied by her manner that she was unhappy with her teacher.

Infer – to take in a hint or suggestion
I inferred from her manner that she was unhappy with me.

Lay/Lie

Lay – to put or place something
Please lay your report on the desk.

Lie – to rest or recline
We asked the sick student to lie down.

Less/Fewer

Less – used for quantities
The amount of money in my savings account is less than it was last month.

Fewer – used for individual units, numbers
You will need to make fewer mistakes on your test.

Stationary/Stationery

Stationary – still, fixed
The computer terminal is stationary.

Stationery – letter paper
Please order more stationery for our office.