This glossary identifies words and constructions that sometimes require attention in composition classes. Some of the entries are pairs of words that are quite different in meaning yet similar enough in spelling to be confused (see principal, principle). Some, such as the use of without as a synonym for unless, are nonstandard usages that are not acceptable in college writing (see without = unless). Some are informal constructions that may be appropriate in some situations but not in others (see guess).

The judgments recorded here about usage are based on the Usage Notes contained in the American Heritage Dictionary, supplemented by other sources. Because these authorities do not always agree, it has sometimes been necessary for the author of this textbook to decide which judgments to accept. In coming to decisions, I have attempted to represent a consensus, but readers should be aware that on disputed items the judgments recorded in this glossary are finally mine.

Because dictionaries do not always distinguish among formal, informal, and colloquial usages, it has seemed useful to indicate whether a particular usage would be appropriate in college writing. The usefulness of this advice, however, depends on an understanding of its limitations. In any choice of usage, the decision depends less on what dictionaries or textbooks say than on what is consistent with the purpose and style of the writing. The student and instructor, who alone have the context of the paper before them, are in the best position to answer that question. All that the glossary can do is provide a background on which particular decisions can be based. The general assumption in the glossary is that the predominant style in college writing is moderate rather than formal or colloquial, so calling a usage informal in no way suggests that it is less desirable than a formal usage.

ad  Ad is the clipped form of advertisement. The full form is preferable in a formal style, especially in letters of application. The appropriateness of ad in college writing depends on the style of the paper.

adapt, adopt  Adapt means “to adjust to meet requirements”: “The human body can adapt itself to all sorts of environments”; “It will take a skillful writer to adapt this novel for the movies.” Adopt means “to take as one’s own” (“He immediately adopted the idea”) or—in parliamentary procedure—“to accept as law” (“The motion was adopted”).

advice, advise  The first form is a noun, the second a verb: “I was advised to ignore his advice.”
affect, effect  Both words may be used as nouns, but effect, meaning “result,” is usually the word wanted: “His speech had an unfortunate effect”; “The treatments had no effect on me.” The noun affect is a technical term in psychology. Although both words may be used as verbs, affect is the more common. As a verb, affect means “impress” or “influence”: “His advice affected my decision”; “Does music affect you that way?” As a verb, effect is rarely required in college writing but may be used to mean “carry out” or “accomplish”: “The pilot effected his mission”; “The lawyer effected a settlement.”

affective, effective  See affect, effect. The common adjective is effective (“an effective argument”), meaning “having an effect.” The use of affective is largely confined to technical discussions of psychology and semantics, in which it is roughly equivalent to “emotional.” In this textbook, affective is used to describe a tone that is chiefly concerned with creating attitudes in the reader (see pages 262–265).

aggravate  Aggravate may mean either “to make worse” (“His remarks aggravated the dispute”) or “to annoy or exasperate” (“Her manners aggravate me”). Both are standard English, but there is still some objection to the second usage. If you mean annoy, exasperate, or provoke, it would be safer to use whichever of those words best expresses your meaning.

ain’t  Except to record nonstandard speech, the use of ain’t is not acceptable in college writing.

all together, altogether  Distinguish between the phrase (“They were all together at last”) and the adverb (“He is altogether to blame”). All together means “all in one place”; altogether means “entirely” or “wholly.”

allow  When used to mean “permit” (“No smoking is allowed on the premises”), allow is acceptable. Its use for “think” (“He allowed it could be done”) is nonstandard and is not acceptable in college writing.

allusion, illusion  An allusion is a reference: “The poem contains several allusions to Greek mythology.” An illusion is an erroneous mental image: “Rouge on pallid skin gives an illusion of health.”

alright  A common variant spelling of all right, but there is still considerable objection to it. All right is the preferred spelling.

among, between  See between, among.

amount, number  Amount suggests bulk or weight: “We collected a considerable amount of scrap iron.” Number is used for items that can be counted: “He has a large number of friends”; “There are a number of letters to be answered.”

an  Variant of the indefinite article a. Used instead of a when the word that follows begins with a vowel sound: “an apple,” “an easy victory,” “an honest opinion,” “an hour,” “an unknown person.” When the word that follows begins with a consonant, or with a y sound or a pronounced h, the article used should be a: “a yell,” “a unit,” “a history,” “a house.” Such constructions as “a apple,” “a hour” are nonstandard. The use of an before historical is an older usage that is now dying out.
and/or  Many people object to and/or in college writing because the expression is associated with legal and commercial writing. Generally avoid it.

angle  The use of angle to mean “point of view” (“Let’s look at it from a new angle”) is acceptable. In the sense of personal interest (“What’s your angle?”), it is slang.

anxious = eager  Anxious should not be used in college writing to mean “eager;” as in “Gretel is anxious to see her gift.” Eager is the preferred word in this context.

any = all  The use of any to mean “all,” as in “He is the best qualified of any applicant,” is not acceptable. Say “He is the best qualified of all the applicants,” or simply “He is the best-qualified applicant.”

any = any other  The use of any to mean “any other” (“The knife she bought cost more than any in the store”) should be avoided in college writing. In this context, use any other.

anyone = all  The singular anyone should not be used in writing to mean “all.” In “She is the most talented musician of anyone I have met here,” omit “of anyone.”

anywheres  A nonstandard variant of anywhere. It is not acceptable in college writing.

apt = likely  Apt is always appropriate when it means “quick to learn” (“He is an apt student”) or “suited to its purpose” (“an apt comment”). It is also appropriate when a predictable characteristic is being spoken of (“When he becomes excited he is apt to tremble”). In other situations the use of apt to mean “likely” (“She is apt to leave you”; “He is apt to resent it”) may be too colloquial for college writing.

as = because  As is less effective than because in showing causal relation between main and subordinate clauses. Since as has other meanings, it may in certain contexts be confusing. For example, in “As I was going home, I decided to telephone,” as may mean “while” or “because.” If there is any possibility of confusion, use either because or while—whichever is appropriate.

as = that  The use of as to introduce a noun clause (“I don’t know as I would agree to that”) is colloquial. In college writing, use that or whether.

as to, with respect to = about  Although as to and with respect to are standard usage, many writers avoid these phrases because they sound stilted: “I am not concerned as to your cousin’s reaction.” Here about would be more appropriate than either as to or with respect to: “I am not concerned about your cousin’s reaction.”

at  Avoid the redundant at in such sentences as “Where were you at?” and “Where do you live at?”

author  Author is not fully accepted as a verb. “To write a play” is preferable to “to author a play.”

awful, awfully  The real objection to awful is that it is worked to death. Instead of being reserved for situations in which it means “awe inspiring,” it is
used excessively as a utility word (see page 246). Use both awful and awfully sparingly.

**bad = badly** The ordinary uses of bad as an adjective cause no difficulty. As a predicate adjective (“An hour after dinner, I began to feel bad”), it is sometimes confused with the adverb badly. After the verbs look, feel, and seem, the adjective is preferred. Say: “It looks bad for our side,” “I feel bad about the quarrel,” “Our predicament seemed bad this morning.” But do not use bad when an adverb is required, as in “He played badly,” “a badly torn suit.”

**bank on = rely on** In college writing rely on is generally preferred.

**being as = because** The use of being as for “because” or “since” in such sentences as “Being as I am an American, I believe in democracy” is nonstandard. Say “Because I am an American, I believe in democracy.”

**between, among** In general, use between in constructions involving two people or objects and among in constructions involving more than two: “We had less than a dollar between the two of us”; “We had only a dollar among the three of us.” The general distinction, however, should be modified when insistence on it would be unidiomatic. For example, between is the accepted form in the following examples:

- He is in the enviable position of having to choose between three equally attractive young women.
- A settlement was arranged between the four partners.
- Just between us girls . . . (when any number of “girls” is involved)

**between you and I** Both pronouns are objects of the preposition between and so should be in the objective case: “between you and me.”

**bi-, semi-** Bi- means “two”: “The budget for the biennium was adopted.” Semi- means “half of”: “semicircle.” Bi- is sometimes used to mean “twice in.” A bimonthly paper, for example, may be published twice a month, not once every two months, but this usage is ambiguous; semimonthly is preferred.

**but that, but what** In such a statement as “I don’t doubt but that you are correct,” but is unnecessary. Omit it. “I don’t doubt but what . . .” is also unacceptable. Delete but what and write that.

**can = may** The distinction that can is used to indicate ability and may to indicate permission (“If I can do the work, may I have the job?”) is not generally observed in informal usage. Either form is acceptable in college writing.

**cannot help but** In college writing, the form without but is preferred: “I cannot help being angry.” (Not: “I cannot help but be angry.”)

**can’t hardly** A confusion between cannot and can hardly. The construction is unacceptable in college writing. Use cannot, can’t, or can hardly.

**capital, capitol** Unless you are referring to a government building, use capital. The building in which the U.S. Congress meets is always capitalized (“the Capitol”). For the various meanings of capital, consult your dictionary.

**censor, censure** Both words come from a Latin verb meaning “to set a value on” or “judge.” Censor is used to mean “appraise” in the sense of evaluating a
book or a letter to see if it may be released (“All outgoing mail had to be censored”) and is often used as a synonym for delete or cut out (“That part of the message was censored”).

Censure as a verb means “to evaluate adversely” or “to find fault with”; as a noun, it means “disapproval,” “rebuke”: “The editorial writers censured the speech”; “Such an attitude will invoke public censure.”

center around “Center on” is the preferred form.

cite, sight, site Cite means “to refer to”: “He cited chapter and verse.” Sight means “spectacle” or “view”: “The garden was a beautiful sight.” Site means “location”: “This is the site of the new plant.”

compare, contrast Compare can imply either differences or similarities; contrast always implies differences. Compare can be followed by either to or with. The verb contrast is usually followed by with.

Compared to her mother, she’s a beauty.
I hope my accomplishments can be compared with those of my predecessor.
His grades this term contrast conspicuously with the ones he received last term.

complement, compliment Both words can be used as nouns and verbs. Complement speaks of completion: “the complement of a verb”; “a full complement of soldiers to serve as an honor guard”; Susan’s hat complements the rest of her outfit tastefully.” Compliment is associated with praise: “The instructor complimented us for writing good papers.”

complement of to be The choice between “It is I” and “It’s me” is a choice not between standard and nonstandard usage but between formal and colloquial styles. This choice seldom has to be made in college writing, since the expression, in whatever form it is used, it essentially a spoken rather than a written sentence. Its use in writing occurs chiefly in dialogue, and then the form chosen should be appropriate to the speaker.

The use of the objective case with the third person (“That was her”) is less common and should be avoided in college writing except when dialogue requires it.

continual, continuous Both words refer to a continued action, but continual implies repeated action (“continual interruptions,” “continual disagreements”), whereas continuous implies that the action never ceases (“continuous pain,” “a continuous buzzing in the ears”).

could of = could have Although could of and could have often sound alike in speech, of is not acceptable for have in college writing. In writing, could of, should of, would of, might of, and must of are nonstandard.

council, counsel Council is a noun meaning “a deliberative body”: “a town council,” “a student council.” Counsel can be either a noun meaning “advice” or a verb meaning “to advise”: “to seek a lawyer’s counsel,” “to counsel a person in trouble.” A person who offers counsel is a counselor: “Because of his low grades Quint made an appointment with his academic counselor.”
credible, creditable, credulous All three words come from a Latin verb meaning “to believe,” but they are not synonyms. Credible means “believable” ("His story is credible"); creditable means “commendable” ("John did a creditable job on the committee") or “acceptable for credit” ("The project is creditable toward the course requirements"); credulous means “gullible” ("Only a most credulous person could believe such an incredible story").
cute A word used colloquially to indicate the general notion of “attractive” or “pleasing.” Its overuse shows lack of discrimination. A more specific term is often preferable.

His daughter is cute. [lovely? petite? pleasant? charming?]
That is a cute trick. [clever? surprising?]
He has a cute accent. [pleasant? refreshingly unusual?]
She is a little too cute for me. [affected? juvenile? clever?]
data is Because data is the Latin plural of datum, it logically requires a plural verb and always takes a plural verb in scientific writing; “These data have been double-checked.” In popular usage and in computer-related contexts, datum is almost never used and data is treated as a singular noun and given a singular subject: “The data has been double-checked.” Either data are or data is may be used in popular writing, but only data are is acceptable in scientific writing.
debut Debut is a noun meaning “first public appearance.” It is not acceptable as a transitive verb ("The Little Theater will debut its new play tonight") or as an intransitive verb ("Cory Martin will debut in the new play").
decent, descent A decent person is one who behaves well, without crudeness and perhaps with kindness and generosity. Decent can mean “satisfactory” ("a decent grade," "a decent living standard"). Descent means “a passage downward”; a descent may be either literal ("their descent into the canyon") or figurative ("hereditary descent of children from their parents," "descent of English from a hypothetical language called Indo-European").
desert, dessert The noun desert means “an uncultivated and uninhabited area”; it may be dry and sandy. Desert can be an adjective: “a desert island.” The verb desert means “to abandon.” A dessert is a sweet food served as the last course at the noon or evening meal.
different from, different than Although both different from and different than are common American usages, the preferred idiom is different from.
disinterested, uninterested The distinction between these words is that disinterested means “unbiased” and uninterested means “apathetic” or “not interested.” A disinterested critic is one who comes to a book with no prejudices or prior judgments of its worth; an uninterested critic is one who cannot get interested in the book. Dictionaries disagree about whether this distinction is still valid in contemporary usage and sometimes treat the words as synonyms. But in college writing the distinction is generally observed.
don’t Don’t is a contraction of “do not,” as doesn’t is a contraction of “does not.” It can be used in any college writing in which contractions are appropriate. But it cannot be used with a singular subject. “He don’t” and “it don’t” are nonstandard usages.

double negative The use of two negative words within the same construction. In certain forms (“I am not unwilling to go”) the double negative is educated usage for an affirmative statement; in other forms (“He hasn’t got no money”) the double negative is nonstandard usage. The observation that “two negatives make an affirmative” in English usage is a half-truth based on a false analogy with mathematics. “He hasn’t got no money” is unacceptable in college writing, not because two negatives make an affirmative, but because it is nonstandard usage.

economic, economical Economic refers to the science of economics or to business in general: “This is an economic law”; “Economic conditions are improving.” Economical means “inexpensive” or “thrifty”: “That is an economical purchase”; “He is economical to the point of miserliness.”

effect, affect See affect, effect.

effective, affective See affective, effective.

either Used to designate one of two things: “Both hats are becoming; I would be perfectly satisfied with either.” The use of either when more than two things are involved (“There are three ways of working the problem; either way will give the right answer”) is a disputed usage. When more than two things are involved, it is better to use any or any one instead of either: “There are three ways of working the problem; any one of them will give the right answer.”

elicit, illicit The first word means “to draw out” (“We could elicit no response from them”); the second means “not permitted” or “unlawful” (“an illicit sale of drugs”).

emigrant, immigrant An emigrant is a person who moves out of a country; an immigrant is one who moves into a country. Thus refugees from Central America and elsewhere who settle in the United States are emigrants from their native countries and immigrants here. A similar distinction holds for the verbs emigrate and immigrate.

eminent, imminent Eminent means “prominent, outstanding”: “an eminent scientist.” Imminent means “ready to happen” or “near in time”: “War seems imminent.”

enormity, enormous, enormousness Enormous refers to unusual size or measure; synonyms are huge, vast, immense: “an enormous fish,” “an enormous effort.” Enormousness is a noun with the same connotations of size and can be applied to either good or bad effects: “The enormousness of their contribution is only beginning to be recognized”; “The enormousness of the lie almost made it believable.” But enormity is used only for evil acts of great dimension: “The enormity of Hitler’s crimes against the Jews shows what can happen when power, passion, and prejudice are all united in one human being.”
enthused  *Enthused* is colloquial for *enthusiastic*: “The probability of winning has caused them to be very enthused about the campaign.” In college writing use *enthusiastic*.

equally as  In such sentences as “He was equally as good as his brother,” the *equally* is unnecessary. Simply write, “He was as good as his brother.”

e.t.c.  An abbreviation for the Latin *et cetera*, which means “and others,” “and so forth.” It should be used only when the style justifies abbreviations and then only after several items in a series have been identified: “The data sheet required the usual personal information: age, height, weight, marital status, etc.” An announcement of a painting contest that states, “Entries will be judged on the basis of use of color, etc.,” does not tell contestants very much about the standards by which their work is to be judged. Avoid the redundant *and* before *etc.*

expect = suppose or suspect  The use of *expect* for *suppose* or *suspect* is colloquial. In college writing use *suppose* or *suspect*: “I suppose you have written to him”; “I suspect that we have made a mistake.”

fact  Distinguish between facts and statements of fact. A fact is something that exists or existed. A fact is neither true nor false, it just is. A statement of fact, or a factual statement, may be true or false, depending on whether it does or does not report the facts accurately.

Avoid padding a sentence with “a fact that,” as in “It is a fact that all the public opinion polls predicted Truman’s defeat in the 1948 election.” The first five words of that sentence add no meaning. Similarly, “His guilt is admitted” says all, in fewer words, that is said by “The fact of his guilt is admitted.”

famous, notorious  *Famous* is a complimentary and *notorious* an uncomplimentary adjective. Well-known people of good repute are famous; those of bad repute are notorious, or infamous.

farther, further  The distinction that *farther* indicates distance and *further* degree is not unanimously supported by usage studies. But to mean “in addition,” only *further* is used: “Further assistance will be required.”

feature = imagine  The use of *feature* to mean “give prominence to,” as in “This issue of the magazine features an article on juvenile delinquency,” is established standard usage and is appropriate in college writing. But this acceptance does not justify the slang use of *feature*, meaning “imagine,” in such expressions as “Can you feature that?” “Feature me in a dress suit,” “I can’t feature him as a nurse.”

e fewer = less  *Fewer* refers to quantities that can be counted individually: “fewer male than female employees.” *Less* is used for collective quantities that are not counted individually (“less corn this year than last”) and for abstract characteristics (“less determination than enthusiasm”).

field  *Field*, in the sense of “an area of study or endeavor,” is an overused word that often creates redundance: “He is majoring in the field of physics”; “Her new job is in the field of public relations.” Delete “the field of” in each of these sentences.
fine = very well  The colloquial use of fine to mean “very well” (“He is doing fine in his new position”) is probably too informal for most college writing.

flaunt = flout  Using flaunt as a synonym for flout confuses two different words. Flaunt means “to show off”: “She has a habit of flaunting her knowledge to intimidate her friends.” Flout means “to scorn or show contempt for”: “He is better at flouting opposing arguments than at understanding them.” In the right context either word can be effective, but the two words are not synonyms and cannot be used interchangeably.

fortuitous, fortunate  Fortuitous means “by chance,” “not planned”: “Our meeting was fortuitous; we had never heard of each other before.” Do not confuse fortuitous with fortunate, as the writer of this sentence has done: “My introduction to Professor Kraus was fortuitous for me; today she hired me as her student assistant.” Fortunate would be the appropriate word here.

funny  Often used in conversation as a utility word that has no precise meaning but may be clear enough in its context. It is generally too vague for college writing. Decide in what sense the subject is “funny” and use a more precise term to convey that sense. (See the discussion of vagueness on pages 245–247).

good  The use of good as an adverb (“He talks good”; “She played pretty good”) is not acceptable. The accepted adverbial form is well. The use of good as a predicate adjective after verbs of hearing, feeling, seeing, smelling, tasting, and the like is standard. See ad.

good and  Used colloquially as an intensive in such expressions as “good and late,” “good and ready,” “good and tired.” The more formal the style, the less appropriate these intensives are. In college writing use them sparingly, if at all.

guess  The use of guess to mean “believe,” “suppose,” or “think” (“I guess I can be there on time”) is accepted by all studies on which this glossary is based. There is objection to its use in formal college writing, but it should be acceptable in an informal style.

had (hadrn’t) ought  Nonstandard for ought and ought not. Not acceptable in college writing.

hanged, hung  Alternative past participles of hang. For referring to an execution, hanged is preferred; in other senses, hung is preferred.

he or she, she or he  Traditionally the masculine form (he, his, him) of the personal pronoun has been used to refer to an individual who could be either male or female: “The writer should revise his draft until he achieves his purpose.” Substituting pronouns that refer to both males and females in the group,
such as he or she, or she or he, corrects the implicit sexism in the traditional usage but sometimes sounds awkward. An alternative is to use plural forms: “Writers should revise their drafts until they achieve their purpose.”

**hopefully** Opinion is divided about the acceptability of attaching this adverb loosely to a sentence and using it to mean “I hope”: “Hopefully, the plane will arrive on schedule.” This usage is gaining acceptance, but there is still strong objection to it. In college writing the safe decision is to avoid it.

**idea** In addition to its formal meaning of “conception,” idea has acquired so many supplementary meanings that it must be recognized as a utility word. Some of its meanings are illustrated in the following sentences:

> The idea (thesis) of the book is simple.
> The idea (proposal) she suggested is a radical one.
> I got the idea (impression) that he is unhappy.
> It is my idea (belief, opinion) that they are both wrong.
> My idea (intention) is to leave early.

The overuse of idea, like the overuse of any utility word, makes for vagueness. Whenever possible, use a more precise synonym.

**illicit, elicit** See elicit, illicit.

**illusion, allusion** See allusion, illusion.

**immigrant, emigrant** See emigrant, immigrant.

**imminent, eminent** See eminent, imminent.

**imply, infer** The traditional difference between these two words is that imply refers to what a statement means, usually to a meaning not specifically stated but suggested in the original statement, whereas infer is used for a listener’s or reader’s judgment or inference based on the statement. For example: “I thought that the weather report implied that the day would be quite pretty and sunny, but Marlene inferred that it meant we’d better take umbrellas.” The dictionaries are not unanimous in supporting this distinction, but in your writing it will be better not to use imply as a synonym for infer.

**individual** Although the use of individual to mean “person” (“He is an energetic individual”) is accepted by the dictionaries, college instructors frequently disapprove of this use, probably because it is overdone in college writing. There is no objection to the adjective individual, meaning “single,” “separate” (“The instructor tries to give us individual attention”).

**inferior than** Possibly a confusion between “inferior to” and “worse than.” Use inferior to: “Today’s workmanship is inferior to that of a few years ago.”

**ingenious, ingenuous** Ingenious means “clever” in the sense of “original”: “an ingenious solution.” Ingenuous means “without sophistication,” “innocent”: “Her ingenuous confession disarmed those who had been suspicious of her motives.”

**inside of, outside of** Inside of and outside of generally should not be used as compound prepositions. In place of the compound prepositions in “The
display is inside of the auditorium” and “The pickets were waiting outside of
the gate,” write “inside the auditorium” and “outside the gate.”

Inside of is acceptable in most college writing when it means “in less than”: “I’ll be there inside of an hour.” The more formal term is within.

Both inside of and outside of are appropriate when inside or outside is a noun followed by an of phrase: “The inside of the house is quite attractive”; “He painted the outside of his boat dark green.”

in terms of An imprecise and greatly overused expression. Instead of “In terms of philosophy, we are opposed to his position” and “In terms of our previous experience with the company, we refuse to purchase its products,” write “Philosophically, we are opposed to his position” and “Because of our previous experience with the company, we refuse to purchase its products.”

irregardless A nonstandard variant of regardless. Do not use it.

irrelevant, irreverent Irrelevant means “having no relation to” or “lacking pertinence”: “That may be true, but it is quite irrelevant.” Irreverent means “without reverence”: “Such conduct in church is irreverent.”

it’s me This construction is essentially a spoken one. Except in dialogue, it rarely occurs in writing. Its use in educated speech is thoroughly established. The formal expression is “It is I.”

-ize The suffix -ize is used to change nouns and adjectives into verbs: civilize, criticize, sterilize. This practice is often overused, particularly in government and business. Avoid such pretentious and unnecessary jargon as finalize, prioritize, and theorize.

judicial, judicious Judicial decisions are related to the administering of justice, often by judges or juries. A judicious person is one who demonstrates good judgment: “A judicious person would not have allowed the young boys to shoot the rapids alone.”

kind of, sort of Use a singular noun and a singular verb with these phrases: “That kind of person is always troublesome”; “This sort of attitude is deplorable.” If the sense of the sentence calls for the plural kinds or sorts, use a plural noun and a plural verb: “These kinds of services are essential.” In questions introduced by what or which, the singular kind or sort can be followed by a plural noun and verb: “What kind of shells are these?”

The use of a or an after kind of (“That kind of a person is always troublesome”) is usually not appropriate in college writing.

kind (sort) of = somewhat This usage (“I feel kind of tired”; “He looked sort of foolish”) is colloquial. The style of the writing will determine its appropriateness in a paper.

latter Latter refers to the second of two. It should not be used to refer to the last of three or more nouns. Instead of latter in “Michigan, Alabama, and Notre Dame have had strong football teams for years, and yet the latter has only recently begun to accept invitations to play in bowl games,” write last or last-named or simply repeat Notre Dame.


**lay, lie**  *Lay* is a transitive verb (principal parts: *lay, laid, laid*) that means “put” or “place”; it is nearly always followed by a direct object: “She lay the magazine on the table, hiding the mail I laid there this morning.”  *Lie* is an intransitive verb (principal parts: *lie, lay, lain*) that means “recline” or “be situated” and does not take an object: “I lay awake all night until I decided I had lain there long enough.”

**leave = let**  The use of *leave* for the imperative verb *let* (“Leave us face it”) is not acceptable in college writing. Write “Let us face it.”

**less**  See fewer.

**liable = likely**  Instructors sometimes object to the use of *liable* to mean “likely,” as in “it is liable to rain,” “He is liable to hit you.”  *Liable* is used more precisely to mean “subject to” or “exposed to” or “answerable for”: “He is liable to arrest”; “You will be liable for damages.”

**like = as, as though**  The use of *like* as a conjunction (“He talks like you do”; “It looks like it will be my turn next”) is colloquial. It is not appropriate in a formal style, and many people object to it in an informal style. The safest policy is to avoid using *like* as a conjunction in college writing.

**literally, figuratively**  *Literally* means “word for word,” “following the letter,” or “in the strict sense.”  *Figuratively* is its opposite and means “metaphorically.” In informal speech, this distinction is often blurred when *literally* is used to mean *nearly*: “She literally blew her top.”  Avoid this usage by maintaining the word’s true meaning: “To give employees a work vacation means literally to fire them.”

**loath, loathe**  *Loath* is an adjective meaning “reluctant,” “unwilling” (“I am loath to do that”; “He is loath to risk so great an investment”) and is pronounced to rhyme with *both*.  *Loathe* is a verb meaning “dislike strongly” (“I loathe teas”; “She loathes an unkempt man”) and is pronounced to rhyme with *clothe*.

**loose, lose**  The confusion of these words frequently causes misspelling.  *Loose* is most common as an adjective: “a loose button,” “The dog is loose.”  *Lose* is always used as a verb: “You are going to lose your money.”

**luxuriant, luxurious**  These words come from the same root but have quite different meanings.  *Luxuriant* means “abundant” and is used principally to describe growing things: “luxuriant vegetation,” “a luxuriant head of hair.”  *Luxurious* means “luxury-loving” or “characterized by luxury”: “He finds it difficult to maintain so luxurious a lifestyle on so modest an income”; “The furnishings of the clubhouse were luxurious.”

**mad = angry or annoyed**  Using *mad* to mean “angry” is colloquial: “My girlfriend is mad at me”; “His insinuations make me mad.”  More precise terms—*angry, annoyed, irritated, provoked, vexed*—are generally more appropriate in college writing.  *Mad* is, of course, appropriately used to mean “insane.”
**majority, plurality** Candidates are elected by a *majority* when they get more than half of the votes cast. A *plurality* is the margin of victory that the winning candidate has over the leading opponent, whether the winner has a majority or not.

**mean = unkind, disagreeable, vicious** Using *mean* to convey the sense “unkind,” “disagreeable,” “vicious” (“It was mean of me to do that”; “He was in a mean mood”; “That dog looks mean”) is a colloquial use. It is appropriate in most college writing, but since using *mean* loosely sometimes results in vagueness, consider using one of the suggested alternatives to provide a sharper statement.

**medium, media, medias** *Medium*, not *media*, is the singular form: “The daily newspaper is still an important medium of communication.” *Media* is plural: “Figuratively, the electronic media have created a smaller world.” *Medias* is not an acceptable form for the plural of *medium*.

**might of** See *could of*.

**mighty = very** *Mighty* is not appropriate in most college writing as a substitute for *very*. Avoid such constructions as “He gave a mighty good speech.”

**moral, morale** Roughly, *moral* refers to conduct and *morale* refers to state of mind. A moral man is one who conducts himself according to standards for goodness. People are said to have good morale when they are cheerful, cooperative, and not too much concerned with their own worries.

**most = almost** The use of *most* as a synonym for *almost* (“I am most always hungry an hour before mealtime”) is colloquial. In college writing *almost* would be preferred in such a sentence.

**must (adj. and n.)** The use of *must* as an adjective (“This book is must reading for anyone who wants to understand Russia”) and as a noun (“It is reported that the President will classify this proposal as a must”) is accepted as established usage by the dictionaries.

**must of** See *could of*.

**myself = I, me** *Myself* should not be used for *I* or *me*. Avoid such constructions as “John and myself will go.” *Myself* is acceptably used as an intensifier (“I saw it myself”; “I myself will go with you”) and as a reflexive object (“I hate myself”; “I can’t convince myself that he is right.”)

**nauseous = nauseated** *Nauseous* does not mean “experiencing nausea”; *nauseated* has that meaning: “The thought of making a speech caused her to feel nauseated.” *Nauseous* means “causing nausea” or “repulsive”: “nauseous odor,” “nauseous television program.”

**nice** A utility word much overused in college writing. Avoid excessive use of *nice* and, whenever possible, choose a more precise synonym.

That’s a nice dress. [attractive? becoming? fashionable? well-made?]
She a nice person. [agreeable? charming? friendly? well-mannered?]
not all that  The use of not all that interested to mean “not much interested” is generally not acceptable in college writing.

off, off of = from  Neither off nor off of should be used to mean “from.” Write “Jack bought the old car from a stranger,” not “off a stranger” or “off of a stranger.”

OK, O.K.  Its use in business to mean “endorse” is generally accepted: “The manager OK’d the request.” In college writing OK is a utility word and is subject to the general precaution concerning all such words: Do not overuse it, especially in contexts in which a more specific term would give more efficient communication. For example, contrast the vagueness of OK in the first sentence with the discriminated meanings in the second and third sentences:

The mechanic said the tires were OK.
The mechanic said the tread on the tires was still good.
The mechanic said the pressure in the tires was satisfactory.

one  See you.

only  The position of only in such sentences as “I only need three dollars” and “If only Mother would write!” is sometimes condemned on the grounds of possible ambiguity. In practice, the context usually rules out any but the intended interpretation, but a change in the word order would result in more appropriate emphasis: “I need only three dollars”; “If Mother would only write!”

on the part of  The phrase on the part of (“There will be some objection on the part of the students”; “On the part of business people, there will be some concern about taxes”) often contributes to wordiness. Simply say “The students will object,” “Business people will be concerned about taxes.”

party = person  The use of party to mean “person” is appropriate in legal documents and the responses of telephone operators, but these are special uses. Generally avoid this use in college writing.

per, a  “You will be remunerated at the rate of forty dollars per diem” and “The troops advanced three miles per day through the heavy snow” show established use of per for a. But usually “forty dollars a day” and “three miles a day” would be more natural expressions in college writing.

percent, percentage  Percent is used when a specific portion is named: “five percent of the expenses.” Percentage is used when no number is given: “a small percentage of the expenses.” When percent or percentage is part of a subject, the noun or pronoun of the of phrase that follows determines the number of the verb: “Forty percent of the wheat is his”; “A large percentage of her customers pay promptly.”

personal, personnel  Personal means “of a person”; “a personal opinion,” “a personal matter.” Personnel refers to the people in an organization, especially employees: “Administrative personnel will not be affected.”
phenomenon, phenomena  

Phenomenon is singular; phenomena is plural: “This is a striking phenomenon.” “Many new phenomena have been discovered with the radio telescope.”

plenty  
The use of plenty as a noun (“There is plenty of room”) is always acceptable. Its use as an adverb (“It was plenty good”) is not appropriate in college writing.

practical, practicable  

Avoid interchanging the two words. Practical means “useful, not theoretical,” and practicable means “feasible, but not necessarily proved successful”: “The designers are usually practical, but these new blueprints do not seem practicable.”

première  
Première is acceptable as a noun (“The première for the play was held in a small off-Broadway theater”), but do not use it as a verb. Instead of “The play premièred in a small off-Broadway theater,” write “The play opened . . .”

preposition (ending sentence with)  

A preposition should not appear at the end of a sentence if its presence there draws undue attention to it or creates an awkward construction, as in “They are the people whom we made the inquiries yesterday about.” But there is nothing wrong with writing a preposition at the end of a sentence to achieve an idiomatic construction: “Isn’t that the man you are looking for?”

principal, principle  
The basic meaning of principal is “chief” or “most important.” It is used in this sense both as a noun and as an adjective: “the principal of a school,” “the principal point.” It is also used to refer to a capital sum of money, as contrasted with interest on the money: “He can live on the interest without touching the principal.” Principle is used only as a noun and means “rule,” “law,” or “controlling idea”: “the principle of ‘one man, one vote’”; “Cheating is against my principles.”

proceed, precede  
To proceed is to “go forward”; to precede means “to go ahead of”: “The blockers preceded the runner as the football team proceeded toward the goal line.”

prophecy, prophesy  
Prophecy is always used as a noun (“The prophecy came true”); prophesy is always a verb (“He prophesied another war”).

proved, proven  
When used as past participles, both forms are standard English, but the preferred form is proved: “Having proved the first point, we moved to the second.” Proven is preferred when the word is used primarily as an adjective: “She is a proven contender for the championship.”

quote  
The clipped form for quotation (“a quote from Walden”) is not acceptable in most college writing. The verb quote (“to quote Thoreau”) is acceptable in all styles.

raise, rise  
Raise is a transitive verb, taking an object, meaning to cause something to move up; rise is an intransitive verb meaning to go up (on its own): “I raised the window in the kitchen while I waited for the bread dough to rise.”
rarely ever, seldom ever  The ever is redundant. Instead of saying, “He is rarely ever late” and “She is seldom ever angry,” write, “He is rarely late” and “She is seldom angry.”

real = really (very)  The use of real to mean “really” or “very” (“It is a real difficult assignment”) is a colloquial usage. It is acceptable only in a paper whose style is deliberately colloquial.

reason . . . because  The construction is redundant: “The reason he couldn’t complete his essay is because he lost his note cards.” Substitute that for because: “The reason he couldn’t complete his essay is that he lost his note cards.” Better yet, simply eliminate the reason and is: “He couldn’t complete his essay because he lost his note cards.”

refer back  A confusion between look back and refer. This usage is objected to in college writing on the ground that since the re- of refer means “back,” refer back is redundant. Refer back is acceptable when it means “refer again” (“The bill was referred back to the committee”); otherwise, use refer (“Let me refer you to page 17”).

regarding, in regard to, with regard to  These are overused and stuffy substitutes for the following simple terms: on, about, or concerning: “The attorney spoke to you about the testimony.”

respectfully, respectively  Respectfully means “with respect”: “respectfully submitted.” Respectively means “each in turn”: “These three papers were graded respectively A, C, and B.”

right (adv.)  The use of right as an adverb is established in such sentences as “He went right home” and “It served her right.” Its use to mean very (“I was right glad to meet him”) is colloquial and should be used in college writing only when the style is colloquial.

right, rite  A rite is a ceremony or ritual. This word should not be confused with the various uses of right.

said (adj.)  The use of said as an adjective (“said documents,” “said offense”) is restricted to legal phraseology. Do not use it in college writing.

same as = just as  The preferred idiom is “just as”: “He acted just as I thought he would.”

same, such  Avoid using same or such as a substitute for it, this, that, them. Instead of “I am returning the book because I do not care for same” and “Most people are fond of athletics of all sorts, but I have no use for such,” say “I am returning the book because I do not care for it” and “Unlike most people, I am not fond of athletics.”

scarcely  In such sentences as “There wasn’t scarcely enough” and “We haven’t scarcely time,” the use of scarcely with a negative creates an unacceptable double negative. Say “There was scarcely enough” and “We scarcely have time.”

scarcely . . . than  The use of scarcely . . . than (“I had scarcely met her than she began to denounce her husband”) is a confusion between “no sooner . . . than” and “scarcely . . . when.” Say “I had no sooner met her than she began to
denounce her husband” or “I had scarcely met her when she began to
denounce her husband.”

seasonable, seasonal Seasonable and its adverb form seasonably mean “ap-
propiate(ly) to the season”: “She was seasonably dressed for a late-fall football
game”; “A seasonable frost convinced us that the persimmons were just right
for eating.” Seasonal means “caused by a season”: “increased absenteeism
because of seasonal influenza,” “flooding caused by seasonal thaws.”

-selves The plural of self is selves. Such a usage as “They hurt themselfs” is
nonstandard and is not acceptable in college writing.

semi- See bi-, semi-.

sensual, sensuous Sensual has unfavorable connotations and means “cater-
ing to the gratification of physical desires”: “Always concerned with satisfying
his sexual lust and his craving for drink and rich food, the old baron led a
totally sensual existence.” Sensuous has generally favorable connotations and
refers to pleasures experienced through the senses: “The sensuous comfort of
a warm bath,” “the sensuous imagery of the poem.”

set, sit These two verbs are commonly confused. Set meaning “to put or
place” is a transitive verb and takes an object. Sit meaning “to be seated” is an
intransitive verb. “You can set your books on the desk and then sit in that
chair.”

shall, will In American usage the dominant practice is to use will in the sec-
ond and third persons to express either futurity or determination and to use
either will or shall in the first person.

In addition, shall is used in statements of law (“Congress shall have the
power to . . .”), in military commands (“The regiment shall proceed as directed”),
and in formal directives (“All branch offices shall report weekly to the home
office”).

should, would These words are used as the past forms of shall and will
respectively and follow the same pattern (see shall, will): “I would [should]
be glad to see him tomorrow”; “He would welcome your ideas on the subject”;
“We would [should] never consent to such an arrangement.” They are also
used to convert shall or will in direct discourse into indirect discourse:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Discourse</th>
<th>Indirect Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Shall I try to arrange it?” he asked.</td>
<td>He asked if he should try to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I said, “They will need money.”</td>
<td>arrange it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

should of See could of.

sight, site, cite See cite, sight, site.

so (conj.) The use of so as a connective (“The salesperson refused to exchange
the merchandise, so we went to the manager”) is thoroughly respectable, but its
overuse in college writing is objectionable. There are other good transitional con-
nectives—accordingly, for that reason, on that account, therefore—that could be used
to relieve the monotony of a series of so’s. Occasional use of subordination (“When the salesperson refused to exchange the merchandise, we went to the manager”) also brings variety to the style.

**some** The use of some as an adjective of indeterminate number (“Some friends of yours were here”) is acceptable at all levels of writing. Its use as an intensive (“That was some meal!”) or as an adverb (“She cried some after you left”; “This draft is some better than the first one”) should be avoided in college writing.

**sort of** See kind of.

**stationary, stationery** Stationary means “fixed” or “unchanging”; “The battle front is now stationary.” Stationery means “writing paper”; “a box of stationery.” To remember the distinction, associate the e in stationery with the e’s in letter.

**suit, suite** The common word is suit: “A suit of clothes”; “Follow suit, play a diamond”; “Suit yourself.” Suite, pronounced “sweet,” means “retinue” (“The President and his suite have arrived”) or “set” or “collection” (“a suite of rooms,” “a suite of furniture”). When suite refers to furniture, an alternative pronunciation is “suit.”

**sure = certainly** Using sure in the sense of “certainly” (“I am sure annoyed”; “Sure, I will go with you”) is colloquial. Unless the style justifies colloquial usage, use certainly or surely.

**terrific** Used at a formal level to mean “terrifying” (“a terrific epidemic”) and at a colloquial level as an intensive (“a terrific party,” “a terrific pain”). Overuse of the word at the colloquial level has made it almost meaningless.

**than, then** Than is a conjunction used in comparison; then is an adverb indicating time. Do not confuse the two: “I would rather write in the morning than in the afternoon. My thinking seems to be clearer then.”

**that, which, who** That refers to persons or things, which refers to things, and who refers to persons. That introduces a restrictive clause, and which usually introduces a nonrestrictive clause: “John argued that he was not prepared to take the exam, but the exam, which had been scheduled for some time, could not be changed”; “Anyone who was not ready would have to take the test anyway.”

**there, their, they’re** Although these words are pronounced alike, they have different meanings. There indicates place: “Look at that dog over there.” Their indicates possession: “I am sure it is their dog.” They’re is a contraction of “they are”: “They’re probably not home.”

**thusly** Not an acceptable variant of thus.

**tough** The use of tough to mean “difficult” (“a tough assignment,” “a tough decision”) and “hard fought” (“a tough game”) is accepted without qualification by reputable dictionaries. But its use to mean “unfortunate,” “bad” (“The fifteen-yard penalty was a tough break for the team”; “That’s tough”) is colloquial and should be used only in a paper written in a colloquial style.
troop, troupe  Both words come from the same root and share the original meaning, “herd.” In modern usage troop can refer to soldiers and troupe to actors: “a troop of cavalry,” “a troop of scouts,” “a troupe of circus performers,” “a troupe of entertainers.”

try and  Try to is the preferred idiom. Use “I will try to do it” instead of “I will try and do it.”

type = type of  Type is not acceptable as a variant form of type of. In “That type engine isn’t being manufactured anymore,” add of after type.

uninterested, disinterested  See disinterested.

unique  The formal meaning of unique is “sole” or “only” or “being the only one of its kind”; “Adam was unique in being the only man who never had a mother.” The use of unique to mean “rare” or “unusual” (“Americans watched their television sets anxiously as astronauts in the early moon landings had the unique experience of walking on the moon”) has long been popular, but some people still object to this usage. The use of unique to mean merely “uncommon” (“a unique sweater”) is generally frowned upon. Unique should not be modified by adverbs that express degree: very, more, most, rather.

up  The adverb up is idiomatically used in many verb-adverb combinations that act as verbs—break up, clean up, fill up, get up, tear up. Avoid the unnecessary or awkward separation of up from the verb with which it is combined, since such a separation makes up look at first like an adverb modifying the verb rather than an adverb combining with the verb in an idiomatic expression. For example, “They held the cashier up” and “She made her face up” are awkward. Say “They held up the cashier,” “She made up her face.”

use to  The d in used to is often not pronounced; it is elided before the t in to. The resulting pronunciation leads to the written expression use to. But the acceptable written phrase is used to: “I am used to the noise”; “He used to do all the grocery shopping.”

very  A common intensive, but avoid its overuse.

wait on  Wait on means “serve”: “A clerk will be here in a moment to wait on you.” The use of wait on to mean “wait for” (“I’ll wait on you if you won’t be long”) is a colloquialism to which there is some objection. Use wait for: “I’ll wait for you if you won’t be long.”

want in, out, off  The use of want followed by in, out, or off (“The dog wants in”; “I want out of here”; “I want off now”) is colloquial. In college writing supply an infinitive after the verb: “The dog wants to come in.”

want to = ought to, should  Using want to as a synonym for should (“They want to be careful or they will be in trouble”) is colloquial. Ought to or should is preferred in college writing.

where . . . at, to  The use of at or to after where (“Where was he at?” “Where are you going to?”) is redundant. Simply write “Where was he?” and “Where are you going?”
whose, who’s  Whose is the possessive of who; who’s is a contraction of who is or who has: “In the play, John is the character whose son leaves town. Who’s going to try out for that part?”

will, shall  See shall, will.

-wise  Avoid adding the suffix -wise, meaning “concerning,” to nouns to form such combinations as budgetwise, jobwise, tastewise. Some combined forms with -wise are thoroughly established (clockwise, otherwise, sidewise, weatherwise), but the fad of coining new compounds with this suffix is generally best avoided.

without = unless  Without is not accepted as a conjunction meaning “unless.” In “There will be no homecoming festivities without student government sponsors them,” substitute unless for without.

with respect to  See as to.

worst way  When in the worst way means “very much” (“They wanted to go in the worst way”), it is too informal for college writing.

would, should  See should, would.

would of  See could of.

would have = had  Would is the past-tense form of will, but its overuse in student writing often results in awkwardness, especially, but not only, when it is used as a substitute for had. Contrast the following sentences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awkward</th>
<th>Revised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If they would have done that earlier, there would have been no trouble.</td>
<td>If they had done that earlier, there would have been no trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or:</td>
<td>Had they done that earlier, there would have been no trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We would want some assurance that they would accept before we would make such a proposal.</td>
<td>We would want some assurance of their acceptance before we made such a proposal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, avoid the repetition of would have in the same sentence.

you = one  The use of you as an indefinite pronoun instead of the formal one is characteristic of an informal style. If you adopt you in an informal paper, be sure that this impersonal use will be recognized by your readers; otherwise, they are likely to interpret a general statement as a personal remark addressed specifically to them. Generally avoid shifting from one to you within a sentence (see page 499).

yourself  Yourself is appropriately used as an intensifier (“You yourself told me that”) and as a reflexive object (“You are blaming yourself too much”). But usages such as the following are not acceptable: “Marian and yourself must shoulder the responsibility” and “The instructions were intended for Kate and yourself.” In these two sentences, replace yourself with you. The plural form is yourselves, not yourselfs.