

Watch your Word Choice

FIVE OH-SO-AVOIDABLE BLUNDERS

The written word is no longer restricted to the writer's domain.

The effect of a faux pas can have even more far-reaching consequences – embarrassing (at best) and devastating (at worst) – on your personal reputation and professional standing. Commit these basic rules to memory, and you're on your way to maintaining a modicum of dignity.



They're vs. There vs. Their

Continual misuse of this rule makes it a requisite for any guide. Easy-as-pie trick: *they're* is simply a contraction of *they are*, *there* (think: here) refers to a place and *their* (think: heir) indicates possession.

Right: The girls spotted their ticket to a free lunch.

Right: "They're stealing my lunch money!" the boy cried.

Wrong: The teacher added there names to the detention list.

[*Right:* The teacher added their names to the detention list posted over there where they're sitting.]

Effect vs. Affect

Almost always, *affect* is a verb (often meaning "to influence") and *effect* is a noun (often meaning "result"). *Effect* is only used as a verb when it means to "bring about." For example: He was able to *effect* change in the community.

Right: She affected a British accent.

Right: It had a charming effect on the young man.

Wrong: It affectively doomed him.

[*Right:* It effectively doomed him.]

Then vs. Than

People often use these words interchangeably. Yet, *then* indicates time, while *than* indicates a comparison.

Right: He went further in the election than his opponent.

Right: Only then did she decide to become his avid supporter.

Wrong: Party unity looks better then discord.

[*Right:* Party unity looks better than discord.]

i.e. vs. e.g.

These abbreviations can be cruel. Based on Latin words, *i.e.* means "in other words" and *e.g.* means "for example." So, examples are listed after *e.g.*, while further clarification is provided by *i.e.*

Right: Don't forget to pick up the groceries (e.g., milk, eggs, etc.). [Reason: Milk and eggs are examples.]

Wrong: He remembered that the upcoming holiday, e.g., Christmas, is also Susan's birthday. [Reason: The upcoming holiday is Christmas, so *i.e.* should precede that clarifying detail.]

Right: Don't forget to say hello to your cousins, *i.e.*, John and Anna. [Reason: Specific details that clarify a statement should follow *i.e.*]

Who vs. Whom

Confusion over *who* and *whom* is so widespread that *whom* is practically disappearing from our lexicon. For those who understand its usage, it can be very helpful in interpreting a sentence's meaning. The difference is easy if you think about it: *Who* refers to the subject of a sentence. *Whom* refers to the object.

Right: Who stole the sandwich? [Reason: You (subject) stole the sandwich.]

Right: This is the sandwich thief about whom I told you. [Reason: I told you about the sandwich thief (object).]

Wrong: With who did you conspire? [Reason: You conspired with him (object). *Whom* refers to object, thus *whom* is correct.]