

Advanced 3
Unit 5 Language Focus 3
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Confusing Words in English

Advice/Advise

Advice is a noun: Chester gave Posey good advice.

Advise is a verb: Chester advised Posey to avoid the questionable chicken salad.

Affect/Effect

Affect is usually a verb: Chester's humming affected Posey's ability to concentrate.

Effect is usually a noun: Chester was sorry for the effect his humming had. If you find yourself stumped about which one to use in a sentence, try substituting the word "alter" or "result." If "alter" fits (Chester's humming altered Posey's ability to concentrate), use affect. If "result" fits (Chester was sorry for the result his humming had), use effect.

Among/Amongst

Among is the preferred and most common variant of this word in American English. Amongst is more common in British English. Neither version is wrong, but amongst may seem fussy to American readers.

Among/Between

Among expresses a collective or loose relationship of several items: Chester found a letter hidden among the papers on the desk. Between expresses the relationship of one thing to another thing or to many other things: Posey spent all day carrying messages between Chester and the other students. The idea that between can be used only when talking about two things is a myth—it's perfectly correct to use between if you are talking about multiple binary relationships.

Assure/Ensure/Insure

Assure means to tell someone that something will definitely happen or is definitely true: Posey assured Chester that no one would cheat at Bingo. Ensure means to guarantee or make sure of something: Posey took steps to ensure that no one cheated at Bingo. Insure means to take out an insurance policy: Posey was glad the Bingo hall was insured against damage caused by rowdy Bingo players.

Breath/Breathe

Breath is a noun; it's the air that goes in and out of your lungs: Chester held his breath while Posey skateboarded down the stairs. Breathe is a verb; it means to exhale or inhale: After Posey's spectacular landing, Chester had to remind himself to breathe again.

Capital/Capitol

Capital has several meanings. It can refer to an uppercase letter, money, or a city where a seat of government is located: Chester visited Brasília, the capital of Brazil. Capitol means the building where a legislature meets: Posey visited the cafe in the basement of the capitol after watching a bill become a law.

Complement/Compliment

A complement is something that completes something else. It's often used to describe things that go well together: Chester's lime green boots were a perfect complement to his jacket. A compliment is a nice thing to say: Posey received many compliments on her purple fedora.

Disinterested/Uninterested

Disinterested means impartial: A panel of disinterested judges who had never met the contestants before judged the singing contest. Uninterested means bored or not wanting to be involved with something: Posey was uninterested in attending Chester's singing class.

Defence/Defense

Defense is standard in American English. Defence is found mainly in British English.

Emigrate/Immigrate

Emigrate means to move away from a city or country to live somewhere else: Chester's grandfather emigrated from Canada sixty years ago. Immigrate means to move into a country from somewhere else: Posey's sister immigrated to Ireland in 2004.

E.g./I.e.

These two Latin abbreviations are often mixed up, but e.g. means "for example," while i.e. means "that is."

Empathy/Sympathy

Empathy is the ability to understand another person's perspective or feelings. Sympathy is a feeling of sorrow for someone else's suffering. A sympathizer is someone who agrees with a particular ideal or cause.

Farther/Further

Farther refers to physical distance: Posey can run farther than Chester. Further refers to metaphorical distance: Chester is further away from finishing his project than Posey is.

Flaunt/Flout

Flaunt means to show off: Chester flaunted his stylish new outfit. Flout means to defy, especially in a way that shows scorn: Posey flouted the business-casual dress code by wearing a tiara and flip-flops.

Gaff/Gaffe

A gaff is a type of spear or hook with a long handle: Chester completed his sailor costume with a gaff borrowed from his uncle's fishing boat. A gaffe is a faux pas or social misstep: Posey made a gaffe when she accidentally called Chester by the wrong name.

Gray/Grey

Gray is the standard American English spelling. Grey is the standard British English spelling.

Historic/Historical

Historic means famous, important, and influential: Chester visited the beach in Kitty Hawk where the Wright brothers made their historic first airplane flight. Historical means related to history: Posey donned a historical bonnet for the renaissance fair.

Imply/Infer

Imply means to hint at something without saying it directly: Chester implied that Posey was in trouble, but he wouldn't tell her why. Infer means to deduce something that hasn't been stated directly: Posey inferred that Chester was nervous about something from the way he kept looking over his shoulder.

It's/Its

It's is a contraction of "it is": Posey needs to pack for her trip because it's only two days away. Its is a possessive pronoun that means "belonging to it": Chester is obsessed with both the book and its author.

Lay/Lie

To lay means to put or to place. One way to remember this is that there is an a in both to lay and to place: Posey will lay out her outfit before she goes to bed. To lie means to recline. One way to remember this is that there is an e in both to lie and to recline: Chester will lie down for a nap. Be careful, though. The past tense of to lay is laid: Posey laid out her outfit. The past tense of to lie is lay: Chester lay down for a nap over an hour ago.

Lead/Led

Lead, when it rhymes with “bed,” refers to a type of metal: Posey wore a lead apron while the dentist X-rayed her teeth. Led is the past tense of the verb to lead, which means to guide or to be first: Chester led the way.

Learned/Learnt

Learned is standard in American English. Learnt is standard in British English.

Loose/Lose

Loose is usually an adjective: Posey discovered that the cows were loose. Lose is always a verb. It means to misplace something or to be unvictorious in a game or contest: Chester was careful not to lose his ticket.

Principal/Principle

Principal can be a noun or adjective. As a noun, it refers to the person in charge of a school or organization: Posey was called into the principal’s office. As an adjective, it means most important: The principal reason for this meeting is to brainstorm ideas for the theme of Chester’s birthday party. A principle (always a noun) is a firmly held belief or ideal: Posey doesn’t like surprise parties as a matter of principle.

Inquiry/Enquiry

Inquiry and enquiry both mean “a request for information.” Inquiry is the standard American English spelling. Enquiry is the British spelling.

Stationary/Stationery

Stationary means unmoving: The revolving door remained stationary because Posey was pushing on it the wrong way. Stationery refers to letter writing materials and especially to high quality paper: Chester printed his résumé on his best stationery.

Than/Then

Than is used for comparisons: Posey runs faster than Chester. Then is used to indicate time or sequence: Posey took off running, and then Chester came along and finished her breakfast.

Their/There/They're

Their is the possessive form of "they": Chester and Posey took their time. There indicates a place: It took them an hour to get there. They're is a contraction of "they are": Are Chester and Posey coming? They're almost here.

To/Too

To is a preposition that can indicate direction: Posey walked to school. She said hello to Chester when she saw him. To is also used in the infinitive form of verbs: Chester waited until the last minute to do his homework. Too is used as an intensifier, and also means "also": Posey waited too long to do her homework, too.

Toward/Towards

Toward is standard in American English. Towards is standard in British English.

Who's/Whose

Who's is a contraction of "who is": Who's calling Chester at this hour? Whose is a possessive pronoun that means "belonging to [someone]": Chester, whose phone hadn't stopped ringing all morning, barely ate anything for breakfast.

Source:

[Top 30 Commonly Confused Words \(Homophones\) in English | Grammarly](#)

access vs. excess

Access is used as a noun referring to the ability to enter, as in "access to the building," and as a verb meaning "to enter," as in "access the stage from the rear."

Excess functions as a noun or adjective that typically has to do with an amount that is more than usual or necessary, as in "an excess of salt" and "excess baggage."

addition vs. edition

Addition and edition are both nouns. Addition refers to something added, as in "new additions to the museum's collection" and "an addition to the house," as well as to the process of adding, as in "the addition of cream to the soup" and "math problems involving addition and subtraction." It's also the word used in phrases with in: "cookies in addition to the pie and cake."

Edition refers to a particular version of a book, product, newspaper, etc., as in "an illustrated edition," or to something presented as one of a series, as in "tonight's edition of the show."

allude vs. elude

Allude is a verb that means "to speak of or mention something or someone in an indirect way," as in "they alluded to difficulties at their former school."

Elude is a verb that most often means "to avoid or escape someone or something by being quick, skillful, or clever," as in "a criminal who has eluded capture."

Check out this article for more about these two words

allusion vs. illusion

Allusion is a noun that means "a statement that refers to something without mentioning it directly," as in "a colleague's allusion to a former spouse."

Illusion is a noun that refers to something that looks or seems different from what it is, as in "paint that creates the illusion of metal" and "an optical illusion." It also refers to an idea that is based on something that is not true, as in "they were under the illusion that the car was brand new."

base vs. bass

Base is a noun, verb, and adjective. The noun has a variety of meanings, several of which refer to a literal or figurative foundation or bottom, as in "the lamp's base," "the base of a mountain," "the company's customer base," and "base of operations." It's also used in various phrases like "touch base" and "on base." The verb base means "to have a particular place as the main place where a person works or lives or where a business operates," as in "a company based in Iowa." It is also used in phrases with on and upon: "an economy based on tourism." The adjective base means "not honest or good," as in "base motives."

Bass is a noun that refers to a low or deep sound or voice, or to a musical instrument. Another word bass rhymes with pass and refers to a kind of fish.

bridal vs. bridle

Bridal is an adjective that is used to describe things relating to a bride or wedding, as in "a bridal gown" and "bridal party."

Bridle is a noun that refers to a device that fits on a horse's head and that is used for guiding and controlling the horse. Bridle is also a verb with two meanings: one is "to put a bridle on a horse"; the other is "to react in an angry way," as in "he bridled at their criticism of his methods."

climactic vs. climatic

Climactic and climatic are both adjectives. Climactic is related to the word climax; it means "most exciting and important," as in "the movie's climactic chase scene."

Climatic means "of or relating to climate," as in "climatic conditions in the region that make it an ideal place to grow grapes."

collaborate vs. corroborate

Collaborate and corroborate are both verbs. Collaborate means "to work with another person or group in order to achieve or do something," as in "collaborating on a book about dogs."

Corroborate means "to support or help prove a statement, theory, etc. by providing information or evidence," as in "two witnesses corroborated her story" and "a theory corroborated by recent studies."

currant vs. current

Currant is a noun that refers to a small raisin or berry.

Current is a noun that refers to a continuous movement of water or air in the same direction, as in "ocean currents," and also to a flow of electricity, as in "a strong/weak electrical current." Current also functions as an adjective meaning "happening or existing now," as in "the current month" and "the magazine's current issue."

desert vs. dessert

Desert functions as a noun referring to an area of very dry land that is usually covered with sand and is very hot. Desert is also a verb that means "to leave a place," as in "residents deserted the town," or "to leave someone or withdraw support for someone," as in "a promise to never desert them." Desert is also the word in the phrase just deserts.

Dessert is sweet food that is eaten after a meal: "ice cream for dessert."

detract vs. distract

Detract and distract are both verbs. Detract means "to reduce the strength, value, or importance of something," as in "a minor error that does not detract from the overall quality of the report."

Distract means "to cause someone to stop thinking about or paying attention to someone or something and to think about or pay attention to someone or something else instead," as in "noises in the hallway that distracted the students."

device vs. devise

Device is a noun that most often refers to an object, machine, or piece of equipment that has been made for some special purpose, as in "electronic devices."

Devise is a verb that means "to invent or plan something that is difficult or complicated," as in "devising a new method for converting sunlight into electricity."

eminent vs. imminent

Eminent and imminent are both adjectives. Eminent means "successful, well-known, and respected," as in "an eminent physician."

Imminent means "happening very soon," as in "awaiting their imminent arrival" or "their arrival is imminent."

envelop vs. envelope

Envelop is a verb that means "to completely enclose or surround someone or something," as in "she enveloped the baby in the blanket" and "mist enveloping the mountains."

Envelope is a noun that refers to an enclosing cover for a letter, card, etc. The word is also used in the phrase "push the envelope," which means "to go beyond the usual or normal limits by doing something new, dangerous, etc.," as in "a writer whose new novel pushes the envelope."

formally vs. formerly

Formally and formerly are both adverbs. Formally is used to describe things done in a serious and proper or official way, as in "guests were dressed formally" and "she has formally announced her candidacy."

Formerly means "at an earlier time," as in "a car formerly owned by my neighbor."

forth vs. fourth

Forth is an adverb used especially in literary contexts to mean "out into notice or view," as in "spring's blossoms bursting forth," and "onward or forward in time or place," as in "from this day forth." It is also used in various phrases such as "and so forth," "back and forth," "bring forth," and "set forth."

Fourth is used as a noun, an adjective, and an adverb with meanings that relate to the number four. As a noun it can mean "number four in a series," as in "arriving on the fourth of May," and "one of four equal parts of something," as in "cut the cake into fourths." As an adjective it means "occupying the number four position in a series," as in "the fourth day"; as an adverb it means "in the fourth place," as in "he finished fourth in the race."

hoard vs. horde

Hoard is used as a noun to refer to a large amount of something valuable that is kept hidden, as in "a dragon's hoard of treasure," and as a verb to mean "to collect and hide a large amount of something valuable," as in "a dragon hoarding treasure."

Horde is a noun that refers to a large group of people, as in "a horde of shoppers crowded the store."

Read this article for more on these two words.

incredible vs. incredulous

Incredible and incredulous are both adjectives. Incredible means "difficult or impossible to believe," as in "a movie telling an incredible story of survival," and "extremely good, great, or large," as in "the musician's incredible skill" and "a place of incredible beauty."

Incredulous means "not able or willing to believe something," as in "people were incredulous that the child had achieved the feat."

This article can give you more detail on these two words.

liable vs. libel

Liable is an adjective that can mean "legally responsible for something," as in "determining who is liable for the damage"; or "likely to be affected or harmed by something," as in "a condition that makes her liable to illness"; or "likely to do something," as in "you're liable to fall if you're not more careful."

Libel is a noun and a verb. As a noun it refers to the act of publishing a false statement that causes people to have a bad opinion of someone, as in "a newspaper found guilty of libel." As a verb it means "to write and publish a false statement that causes people to have a bad opinion of someone," as in "the jury found that the article libeled him."

Read more on these two words here

loose vs. lose

Loose is most often used as an adjective with a variety of meanings that have to do, either literally or figuratively, with something not being tight or tightly fastened, attached, or held. Some examples are: "a loose tooth," "a loose belt," "loose rocks/papers," "a loose coalition." It is also used in various phrases like "break loose," "cut loose," and "let loose." It is also a verb meaning "to release or untie an animal or person" and "to make something less tight."

Lose is a verb with various meanings typically having to do with being unable to find, keep, or hold something, as in "I keep losing my keys," "losing power," "lose money," "lost an advantage," and with failing to win something, as in "losing a game/election." It also appears in common phrases like "lose out," "lose it," "lose contact," and "lose your way."

median vs. medium

Median and medium both function as both nouns and adjectives. As a noun, median can refer to a grassy or paved area that divides a highway (also called "a median strip"), or, in mathematics, to the middle value in a series of values arranged from smallest to largest. The adjective median is usually used in mathematics to mean "having a value that is in the middle of a series of values arranged from smallest to largest," as in "the median price of homes in the area."

Medium as an adjective means "in the middle of a range of possible sizes, amounts, etc.," as in "a person of medium height" and "a medium blue." The noun medium has several meanings, among them "something that is sold in a medium size," as in "I wear a medium," and "a particular form or system of communication (such as newspapers, radio, or television)," as in "an effective advertising medium."

moral vs. morale

Moral is a noun and an adjective. The noun refers to a lesson that is learned from a story or an experience, as in "the moral of the story is to appreciate what you have," and in its plural form morals to proper ideas and beliefs about how to behave in a way that is considered right and good by most people, as in "I don't question her morals." The adjective is used with a variety of meanings having to do with right or wrong behavior, as in "moral issues/standards" and "moral conduct."

Morale is a noun referring to the feelings of enthusiasm and loyalty that a person or group has about a task or job, as in "employee morale was high in the wake of the project's success."

peace vs. piece

Peace is a noun that has several meanings relating to an end to war or fighting or to a state of calm, as in "a wish for world peace," "looking for some peace and quiet," and "peace of mind." It is also used in phrases like "hold your peace" and "make peace with."

Piece is a noun and a verb. As a noun piece has various meanings most of which have to do with a part, amount, or type of something, as in "a piece of pie," "a large piece of land," or "pieces of paper," and "a piece of land." It's also used in various phrases including "to pieces" and "say your piece" more on this phrase The verb piece is typically used with together to express the idea of bringing parts together, as in "piecing together scraps for the quilt" and "we pieced the facts of the story together."

pedal vs. peddle

Pedal is a noun that most often refers to a flat piece of metal, rubber, etc., that you push with your foot to make a machine move, work, or stop, as in "the bike's pedals" and "the car's brake pedal." As a verb it typically means "to push the pedals of something, such as a bicycle," as in "pedaling faster and faster."

Peddle is a verb that is usually used to mean "to sell something usually in small amounts and often by traveling to different places," as in "peddling fruits and vegetables from a roadside cart."

personal vs. personnel

Personal is an adjective often used to describe what belongs to or relates to a particular person, as in "personal property" and "my personal opinion," or to a person's private thoughts, feelings, etc., as in "a very personal question."

Personnel is a noun most often used to refer to people who work for a particular company or organization.

Here is some more detail on how to keep these words apart.

plain vs. plane

Plain functions as an adjective, adverb, and noun. As an adjective, it often describes what lacks decoration, pattern, extra features, etc., as in "plain paper" or "a pair of plain shoes." As an adverb, it means "truly, completely," as in "it's just plain wrong." The noun plain refers to a large area of flat land without trees.

Plane most often functions as a noun referring to an airplane or to a flat surface. It also has verb and noun use with meanings relating to carpentry.

pole vs. poll

Pole is a noun. It can refer to a long, straight piece of wood, metal, etc., that is often placed in the ground so that it stands straight up. Additionally, pole refers to either end of the imaginary line around which something (such as the earth) turns, as in "the north/south pole"; to either one of the two ends of a magnet; to the positive point or the negative point on a battery; or to either one of two opposite positions, situations, etc., as in "opposite poles of an argument."

Poll functions as both a noun and a verb. As a noun it refers to an activity in which several or many people are asked a question or a series of questions in order to get information about what most people think about something; this noun use has a related verb use: a magazine might "conduct a poll," and a magazine might "poll its readers." The noun poll in its plural form polls refers to the record of votes that were made by people in an election or to the places where those people vote.

pore vs. poor vs. pour

Pore functions as a verb meaning "to read or study something very carefully," as in "spent hours poring over the map." As a noun it refers to a very small opening on the surface of your skin.

Poor is an adjective used to mean "having little money or few possessions," as in "a poor person," or to describe something of low quality ("poor soil"), or someone of low skill ("a poor player").

Pour is a verb that means "to cause something to flow in a steady stream from or into a container or place," as in "pour a cup of coffee."

pray vs. prey

Pray is a verb that is used to mean "to speak to God especially in order to give thanks or to ask for something," as in "praying for forgiveness," as well as "to hope or wish very much for something to happen," as in "praying they will succeed."

Prey is used as a noun to refer to an animal that is hunted or killed by another animal for food, as in "the owl's prey," or to someone who is a victim. It also functions as a verb meaning "to hunt," or "to hurt, cheat, or steal from someone," as in "thieves who prey on the city's tourists."

preposition vs. proposition

Preposition and proposition are both nouns. Preposition refers to a word (such as in, on, or to) that is used with a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase to show direction, location, or time, or to introduce an object.

Proposition is a noun that most often refers to something, such as a plan or offer, that is presented to a person or group of people to consider, as in "a business proposition."

Only one letter separates these words so be sure to read more

quiet vs. quite

Quiet functions as an adjective, a verb, and a noun. As an adjective, it mostly describes things or people who make little noise, as in "a quiet engine" and "a quiet person," or a situation or event in which there is little noise, as in "a quiet dinner for two." As a verb, it means "to make or become calmer or less noisy," as in "a lullaby to quiet the crying baby." The noun quiet refers to the quality or state of being quiet or calm, as in "the quiet of the house at midnight."

Quite is an adverb that most often means "very," as in "quite tired"; "completely or entirely," as in "we quite agree"; or "exactly or precisely," as in "not quite what I said."

resume vs. résumé

Resume is a verb that is usually used to mean "to begin again after stopping," as in "the musicians resumed playing."

Résumé is a noun used especially to refer to a short document describing your education, work history, etc., that you give an employer when you are applying for a job.

right vs. rite vs. write

Right functions as an adjective, adverb, noun, and verb. Some common adjective uses are "morally or socially correct or acceptable," as in "the right thing to do," and "accurate or correct," as in "the right answer." Adverbial uses include the directional "toward the right," as in "turn right," and "correctly," as in "you guessed right." Among meanings of the noun right are "behavior that is morally good or correct," as in "knowing right from wrong," and "something that a person is or should be morally or legally allowed to have, get, or do," as in "human rights." As a verb, right often means "to correct something wrong or unjust," as in "trying to right a wrong."

Rite is a noun that refers to an act that is part of a usually religious ceremony, as in "funeral rites."

Write is a verb with various meaning including "to form letters or numbers on a surface with a pen, pencil, etc.," as in "learning to write the alphabet," and "to create a book, poem, story, etc.," as in "writing a book about parrots."

role vs. roll

Role is a noun that refers to the character played by an actor, or to a part or function that someone has in a group, situation, etc., as in "scientists who had a role in finding a cure to the disease."

Roll functions as a verb and a noun. As a verb it has various meanings relating to movement, especially by turning over and over, as in "a ball rolling down a hill," or in a smooth continuous movement, as in "clouds rolling past" and "a car rolling to a stop." As a noun, roll often refers to a long piece of cloth, paper, film, tape, etc., that is rolled to form the shape of a tube or ring, as in "a roll of tape," or to a round sweet cake ("a cinnamon roll"), or to a deep continuous sound, as in "a roll of thunder."

stationary vs. stationery

Stationary is an adjective meaning "not moving" or "not changing," as in "a stationary target" and "a stationary population."

Stationery is a noun that refers to materials (such as paper, pens, and ink) that are used for writing or typing, or specifically to paper that is used for writing letters and that usually has matching envelopes, as in "business stationery."

Read this article for some tips to keep them apart.

statue vs. stature vs. statute

Statue, stature, and statute are all nouns. Statue refers to a figure usually of a person or animal that is made from stone, metal, etc.

Stature refers to the level of respect that people have for a successful person, organization, etc., as in "a writer of her stature," as well as to a person's height, as in "a person of rather short stature."

Statute refers to a written law that is formally created by a government, or to another kind of written rule or regulation.

track vs. tract

Track functions as a noun and a verb. As a noun, it often refers to a mark left on the ground by a moving animal, person, or vehicle, as in "tire tracks," or to a pair of metal bars that a train, trolley, or subway car rides along, as in "train tracks." The verb track often means "to follow and try to find an animal by looking for its tracks and other signs that show where it has gone," as in "hunters tracking deer," or "to follow and find someone or something especially by looking at evidence," as in "tracking the suspect."

Tract is a noun that usually refers to a system of body parts or organs that has a particular purpose, as in "the digestive tract," or to an area of land.

waist vs. waste

Waist is a noun that refers to the middle part of your body between the hips and chest or upper back, or to the part of a piece of clothing that fits around your waist.

Waste is a verb that means "to use something valuable in a way that is not necessary or effective," as in "trying not to waste water/money/time." As a noun, waste often refers to material that is left over or that is unwanted after something has been made, done, used, etc., as in "industrial waste."

wander vs. wonder

Wander is a verb used especially to mean "to move around or go to different places usually without having a particular purpose or direction," as in "wandering through the meadow."

Wonder functions as both a noun and a verb. As a noun it often means "a feeling caused by seeing something that is very surprising, beautiful, amazing, etc.," as in "staring up at the monument in wonder." As a verb it frequently means "to think about something with curiosity," as in "wondering about the city's history."

Source:

[Most Commonly Confused Words | Merriam-Webster](#)