

13 ~~10~~ Common Errors to Avoid

On my way into work this morning, the local radio station was interviewing author, Dean Koontz. When asked what advice would he give to budding writers he said “Don’t lose your style, it is what sets you apart from other writers.” He also said that the best way to become a better writer is to write, then write more and more and keep writing.

We may not be on the road to the next great novel, but we are writing proposals, letters, brochures and other business communications that could be improved. Face it, we get sloppy and sometimes we just may not know the correct use of a word. Sometimes it’s helpful to have a fresh perspective and, at other times, we’re grateful for the sharp eye and pen of a well seasoned editor.

Here are 13 of the most common errors that you can avoid:

1. Myriad is a noun that means an immense number. Writers typically add an “a” before the word and “of” after the word. The correct use of the word in a sentence is: *Thomas had myriad choices of topics for his monthly column.*
2. When you know the Latin translation, it’s easy to avoid this common error: *id est (i.e.)* translates to “that is” or “in other words” and *exempli gratia (e.g.)* means “for example.”
3. The word over is often used in sentences when referencing values: *The store grossed over \$100,000 in its first month.* Over more correctly refers to a motion, downward, forward, a barrier or an intervening space. The sentence should read: *The grossed more than \$100,000 in its first month.*
4. We say it all the time: should of...would of...could of...; but it doesn’t work in print. The correct usage is: *Should have, would have, could have.*
5. Then there’s insure and ensure. This one is fairly easy, yet even seasoned writers make the mistake. The definition of insure is to give or take or procure an insurance on or for. So if you’re talking about State Farm or your health insurance use insure.
6. We are all a very creative bunch. We love making up words. Add a prefix here or there, whatever works. My favorite is irregardless. There’s no such word. Use regardless.
7. Even season professionals make mistakes. I made this one on a big job and I think about it every time I key it: principal versus principle. A simple way to remember this one is: a principal is a person, while a principle is a doctrine or assumption.
8. Another confusing word group: adverse and averse. Adverse is a verb meaning acting against or contrary, while averse is an adjective describing a feeling of repugnance or distaste.

9. This one's good: Its', it's, its. First, there's no possessive of the word *its*. *It's* is a contraction of it is. *Its* is adjective meaning of or relating to it or itself.

10. Allot and a lot. Allot is a verb meaning to assign a share or a portion, while the word lot is a noun meaning an object used as a counter in determining a question by chance.

Just when I thought I was done with this article, my coworkers chimed in and contributed three more items to the list. If you have an example that drives you bonkers and you want to contribute it to the list, just email it to our webmaster and we will post it on our site.

11. Affect or effect. Affect is to produce an effect upon or to influence, while effect is to bring about or accomplish.

12. Then there's your and you're. Your is an ownership pronoun used to indicate possession or ownership. You're is a contraction of you are.

13. To or too? To is a preposition indicating direction; too is an adverb meaning also.

If you want to improve your writing skills, pick up *The Princeton Review, A Guide to Perfect Usage: Grammar Smart* at your local bookstore. It is a great reference book and the perfect gift.