

100 Traps and Trip-Ups: Gallery of Language Pitfalls

Prepared by Ulla de Stricker

Readers are invited to quote from the document with attribution to www.destricker.com

www.destricker.com

The logo for deStricker ASSOCIATES is located in the bottom right corner. It features the text "deStricker" in a white serif font, with "ASSOCIATES" in a smaller, white, all-caps sans-serif font below it. The logo is set against a dark green background with a wavy, light green and red border at the bottom.

Consulting Services for Information
and Knowledge Resources

Gallery of Language Pitfalls: Professionals want to avoid making English language usage errors regardless how commonly such errors may be made even in the media. In the gallery, Ulla de Stricker offers simple tips and solutions for common errors. Questions and suggestions are welcome: ulla@destricker.com

1. *Just because ... doesn't mean.* This mangling is so common most people think it's correct!

WRONG: Just because you're retired doesn't mean you should stop being active in your field.

CORRECT: The fact that you are retired doesn't mean you should stop being active. Your status as a retired person should not imply that you stop being active.

SOLUTION IF YOU'RE NOT SURE: You are retired. That (fact) should not mean ...

Tip: Never begin a sentence with "just because". It is ok to have the phrase at the end of a sentence: Why would I stop being active just because I'm retired?

2. *Comprised of.* There is no such expression!

WRONG: Canada is comprised of provinces and territories.

CORRECT: Canada is composed of ... Canada is made up of ... Canada comprises ...

SOLUTION: In Canada, there are ... Canada contains ...

3. *You and I - You and me* Why are you afraid of me?

WRONG: Peter gave Susan and I a gift / Peter told Susan and I that ...

CORRECT: Peter gave Susan and me a gift / Peter told Susan and me that ...

IF STILL IN DOUBT: Insert *also*: Peter gave Susan and *also gave* me ... Peter told Susan and *also told* me ...

SOLUTION: Susan and I received a gift from Peter. Susan and I heard from Peter that ...

4. *Its vs. It's* ... It's time to put the apostrophe in its proper place - and only there!

WRONG: Look at this report - its amazing how good the photo on it's front page looks.

CORRECT: It's (it is) amazing how good the photo on its front page looks.

MEMORY AID: "It is" has 4 letters so "it's" has 4 characters. "Its" is a possessive similar to "his" - 3 characters.

5. *Try and.* No, please don't. Please try to.

WRONG: I'll try and finish the report by 3pm. [Technically means I will try something unrelated and I will **absolutely** finish the report by 3pm.]

CORRECT: I'll try to finish the report by 3pm.

SOLUTION: I'll attempt to finish the report by 3 pm. I will make every effort to finish ...

6. *The more that* ... Fight the invasion of the "that"!

WRONG: The more that we promote recycling, the more that staff pay attention.

CORRECT: The more we promote recycling, the more attention staff are paying.

SOLUTION: With increasing promotion of recycling, staff are paying more attention.

7. **Pickup, pick-up, or pick up?** A simple trick to remember!

WRONG: I'll pickup the document later today. Could you pick-up the newspaper on your way?

CORRECT: I'll pick up the document. It is available for pickup (or pick-up) after 3 pm.

MEMORY TRICK: If you can separate the words - I'll **pick** the document **up** - they stay separate!

8. **Myriad.** Period!

WRONG: The calendar shows a myriad of meetings this month.

CORRECT: The calendar shows myriad meetings this month.

SOLUTION: Myriad = many, so just use "many": The calendar shows many meetings.

9a. **Complement or compliment?**

Complement = match; Compliment = praise ... with an "i". Therefore:

The staff complimented the designers on the paint job, saying how well the new colors complemented each other.
(The colors don't praise each other.)

9b. **Complementary or complimentary?**

Complementary = matched; Complimentary = gratis, a gift ... with an "i". Therefore:

The two strategies are seen as complementary. The new policy is a complement to the existing safety regulations. The loot bags are compliments of the sponsor. In business class, headphones are complimentary.

10. **The rationale for being rational is well understood.**

WRONG: The rational for the policy is not well understood.

CORRECT: The rationale for the change was well explained. A rational attitude is helpful.

MEMORY TRICK: The stress on the last syllable *elongates* the word, so there's an e.

11. **Who vs. Whom:** "Whom" may sound sophisticated - but think twice.

WRONG: Anna spoke about Bob, whom she thought had been very kind.

CORRECT: Anna spoke about Bob, who had been very kind. (who - she thought - had ...)

CORRECT: Anna spoke about Bob, whom she greatly admired.

Following "to", "for", "from", "with" etc, *whom* is correct: "We will excuse those for whom the early hour is inconvenient".

SOLUTION IF YOU'RE NOT SURE: You could study the formal rules till you are blue in the face and still end up confused. Just rephrase: Anna spoke about Bob, saying he had been very kind. Anna said she admired Bob.

12. **And since we're on the subject of who ...** Economy of words please!

WRONG: There are many people that say ...

CORRECT: Technically: There are many people who say ... but why use unnecessary words?

"Many people say ... " is so much more elegant.

SOLUTION IF YOU'RE NOT SURE: It is commonly believed ...

13. **Reticent vs. hesitant** ... He who hesitates [waits] is lost. The reticent one just won't speak.

WRONG: We asked John to join us, but he was reticent.

CORRECT: We asked John to join us, but he was hesitant.

Reticent means "saying little, keeping silent". Memory trick: **Reticent** persons are not offering their "**2 cents**".

SOLUTION IF YOU'RE NOT SURE: John seemed reluctant - it was a few minutes before he joined us. Peter was quiet - he did not comment on the matter.

14. **"Their"** ... let's get singular and plural straight!

WRONG: Each client is asked to make their payment ... A user gets their password from ...

CORRECT: Each client is asked to make his or her payment ... Users get their passwords from ...

"Their" can be used only in the context of **multiple** people, projects, etc.: Users make their selections ... Customers choose their products ... Projects get their funding from ... According to their preferences, clients receive customized ...

SOLUTION IF YOU'RE NOT SURE: Avoid "their" altogether. Clients are asked to make payments ... Each client is asked to pay by ... A new user may obtain a password from ... Users may obtain passwords from ...

15. **i.e. or e.g.?** ... just spell it out!

WRONG: Vegetables, i.e. carrots (there are no other kinds of vegetables than carrots)

CORRECT: Vegetables, e.g. carrots (there are many kinds of vegetables and carrots are an example)

"i.e." means "that is", "in other words", "identical to" ... and "e.g." means "for example".

SOLUTION IF YOU'RE NOT SURE: Spell out the expression. Vegetables, for example carrots, are grown in the community garden plots. I will ask my closest friend, that is George, to help me plant a vegetable garden.

16. **Who vs. That:** The fear of WHO lives on!

WRONG: I know a consultant that can help us.

CORRECT: I know a consultant who ...

Although words like consultant, colleague, client etc are nouns, they refer to humans and deserve a great big "WHO"!

SOLUTION IF YOU'RE NOT SURE: I know a consultant specializing in our business. He can help.

17. **Those that:** The tipoff is having two th-words together

WRONG: Those that are unable to attend the meeting will receive a summary.

CORRECT: Those who are ...

When "those" refers to people - "WHO" it is!

BETTER YET: Those unable to make the meeting will receive ...

TRICK: If "those" refers to objects, still avoid the inelegant "that": Instead of "those projects that are not yet finished will get special attention" say "those projects not yet finished will get special attention" or better "projects not yet finished will get special attention".

18a. *As a loyal employee, the management committee decided to reward you ...* Who is on the right hand side of the comma?

WRONG: As a preferred customer, we want to introduce our new premium service ...

WRONG: As our top performer, I am pleased to give you this award. (Who is the top performer?)

WRONG: As your personal assistant, this is a personal reminder of your 1 pm appointment.

WRONG: After having attended the presentation, one opportunity stood out.

CORRECT: As a preferred customer, you could benefit from our new premium service ...

CORRECT: As our top performer, you have richly deserved this award.

CORRECT: As your personal assistant, I am reminding you of your 1 pm appointment.

CORRECT: After having [Once I had] attended the presentation, I saw one opportunity standing out.

SOLUTION: Construct a sentence:

You are a preferred customer, and we want to offer you ...

You are valued employees, and therefore a new benefit is being offered to you.

You are our top performer, and I am pleased to give you this award.

18b. Even without the "as" the problem persists:

WRONG: A skilled manager, his team respected him. An accomplished musician, her audiences adored her.

CORRECT: A skilled manager, he had the respect of his team. An accomplished musician, she was adored by her audiences.

SOLUTION: Construct a sentence: He was a skilled manager, and therefore he had the respect of his staff. She was an accomplished musician, and her audiences adored her.

19. *In regards to ...* Remember "comprised of"? There is no such expression!

WRONG: In regards to item 4 on the agenda ...

CORRECT: Regarding item 4 ... As for item 4 ... With reference to item 4 ... Respecting item 4 ... Pertaining to item 4 ... In connection with item 4 ...

SOLUTION: Forever banish "in regards to" from your vocabulary!

20. *There/their/they're; your/you're:* Let's just get it right!

WRONG: As for the managers ... there new blackberrys haven't arrived? Your kidding?

WRONG: Their is a new blackberry on the market. You're staff will want it!

CORRECT: As for the managers ... their new blackberrys haven't arrived? You're kidding?

CORRECT: There is a new blackberry on the market. Your staff will want it!

The above examples are a mix of many errors. FOLLOW THESE MODELS:

There are three meetings today. There could be a room conflict.

Two new employees arrive today. Their orientation is at 3pm. They're [they are] invited to the boardroom at 4pm.

Welcome to new employees: Your orientation is at 3pm. You're [you are] invited to the boardroom at 4pm.

21. Between ... to. NO - Between ... and.

WRONG: Between 5 to 7 percent

CORRECT: Between 5 and 7 percent; 5 to 7 percent

If you use "between" you are committed and must use "and"!

22. June 1998 or June, 1998? Here's the trick. No day, no comma. Just follow these models:

CORRECT:

In June of 1998, a meeting was held. Later, in July 1998, it was decided ...

In late June 1998, a meeting was held. At the end of July 1998, it was decided ...

On June 16, 1998, a meeting was held (the European is an alternative: On 16 June 1998, a meeting was held)

The meeting was slated to be held between early June and late September 1998.

The cafeteria was closed for renovations from December 13, 1998 to January 11, 1999.

23. Let's be clear on lets!

WRONG: The new system let's us issue parking permits in mere seconds.

WRONG: I'm delighted with online banking - it let's me move money and pay bills so easily.

CORRECT: The new system lets us issue parking permits in mere seconds.

CORRECT: I'm delighted with online banking - it lets me move money and pay bills so easily.

SOLUTION IF YOU'RE NOT SURE: Use another verb: The new system makes it possible ...

MEMORY TRICK: "Let's" (let us) is used when we are suggesting something: Let's defer the matter to next month.

24. ***Reason is because ... reason is due to ... due to X reasons*** ... Oh frog!

WRONG: The reason for the delay is because the supplier shipment is late / is due to the late supplier shipment.

WRONG: Due to security reasons, ...

CORRECT: The reason for the delay is the slippage in the supplier's shipment schedule.

CORRECT: Due to (as a result of) security protocol changes, parcels will now be checked. For security reasons, all parcels will be checked. As a result of security concerns, parcels will be checked. Due to theft, prices are going up.

TRICK: We are not frogs, so we don't "RiBiD". Reason, Because, Due: Pick **one**.

25. ***Due ... or do?*** Just do it, the report is due soon!

WRONG: I'll make due with what I have. The report is do Monday.

CORRECT: I'll make do with what I have. The report is due Monday.

26. ***Disinterested vs. uninterested:*** Are you impartial, or doesn't the subject grab you?

WRONG: I am disinterested in attending the company picnic.

CORRECT: I am uninterested in (have no desire for) attending the picnic.

CORRECT: We need a disinterested (impartial, neutral) person to comment on the conflict.

PS: Same goes for disinclined vs. uninclined!

27. ***Lielay, Laylie:*** Let's not sound like country song lyrics!

WRONG: Wouldn't we all love to lay on the beach! Oh, to be laying in the lap of luxury!

CORRECT: ... lie on the beach. ... lying in the lap of luxury.

"Lay" is a transitive verb, meaning "put an object somewhere": May I lay the parcel here on the counter?

"Lie" is intransitive, meaning "stay in one place": Is it OK for the parcel to lie here until someone comes to get it?

When the country singer sings "I'm laying here alone" ... we must wonder what he or she is laying ... train tracks?

But of course, it gets confusing when we go to past tense.

WRONG: I laid on the beach all afternoon yesterday.

CORRECT: I lay on the beach all afternoon yesterday.

Here's the drill:

LAY - LAYING - LAID - LAID - LAYING: Someone is putting something somewhere.

I now lay a parcel on the counter. I'm laying it down right this second. Yesterday, I laid a parcel on the counter. I have laid a parcel on this counter many times. I'll be laying wreaths at this monument for as long as I'm able. I have been laying memorial wreaths at the monument for many years.

LIE - LYING - LAY - LAIN - LYING: Someone or something is staying in one place.

The matter lies dormant for the moment. The matter is lying dormant for now. The matter lay dormant for 3 months before the new board could deal with it. The matter has lain dormant for months, but now it is on the agenda. The matter will be (has been) lying dormant for some time.

SOLUTION IF YOU'RE NOT SURE: Use another verb. How long has this parcel been sitting here? I stayed on the beach for hours. She will be using the couch while her guests have the bedroom.

PS: The common expression "lay of the land" should be "lie of the land" (how the land lies). You may just want to omit the phrase from your vocabulary since the error is pervasive - you'll be using the correct phrase and others may think you aren't!

28. Locate or find? Depends - are we talking place or discovery?

WRONG: Users say they can't locate the information they need on the intranet.

CORRECT: Users say they can't find the information they need.

"Locate" means "place, situate": The architects want to locate a secondary entrance on the building's south side. The restrooms are located at the end of the hallway.

29. "of a": Av-oid the combination! (Take my word: Just avoid it!)

WRONG: I am not that good of a dancer. It was that critical of a situation ...

CORRECT: I am not that good a dancer. The situation was so critical ... It was such a critical situation ...

30. *Issue-ification* ... don't we have enough issues already?

GRATING: How many issues are on the agenda?

APPROPRIATE: How many items are on the agenda?

"Issue" means difficulty, conflict, problem, sore point, etc. "Please vote on the coffee issue" is over the top when the matter at hand is a request for input on preferences for the lunch room!

SOLUTION IF YOU'RE NOT SURE: Will "matter" or "subject" or "topic" do the job? If so, avoid the "issue"!

31. **Principal vs. Principle:** "pal" is a person, a key item, or a loan amount; "ple" is a concept

WRONG: The principle reason is cost. The School Principle will speak at noon. The loan principle is \$x.

CORRECT: The principal reason is cost. The School Principal will speak at noon. The loan principal is \$x.

Moral or ethical *principles* guide our beliefs and decisions. "The principal reason we support the School Principal's proposal is that we agree with the underlying principle of democratic process."

SOLUTION IF YOU'RE NOT SURE: The main guideline in our decision to support the School's Management is ...

32. They sound the same, but ...

Horde: large group of people, animals **Hoard:** stash, collect; a collection

Phase: stage **Faze:** discourage, stop

Defuse: calm down **Diffuse:** spread out, distribute

Loath: I am loath (hesitant) to reduce the price **Loathe:** We just loathe (detest) those garish colors

Lose: be without **Loose:** not tight, set free

33. Whose or who's ? Answer: Who Is!

WRONG: Who's are these shoes? Employees who's pension plans are locked in ... Whose responsible?

CORRECT: Whose are these shoes? Employees whose pension plans are locked in ... Who's [who is] responsible?

TRICK: Speak it out! "Employees who is benefits" clearly is wrong and so points to "employees whose benefits".

34. **Dependant vs. Dependent:** You may safely lose the ant - it's only a "vari-ant".

WRONG: He has two dependants. Dependant on the court judgment, ...

CORRECT: He has two dependents. Depending on the court judgment, ...

SOLUTION IF YOU'RE NOT SURE: Two children depend on him. It will depend on the court judgment whether ...

35. Doubling up consonants is a terrible fad. **What's next - Marketing? Editing?** Just don't do it.

WRONG: Benefitting ... Focussing ... Focussed

CORRECT: Benefiting ... Focusing ... Focused

QUESTIONABLE: Medallist ... Finallist ... Panellist

CORRECT: Medalist ... Finalist ... Panelist

The list of rules is too long to cover here, and indeed usage is different in British ("labelled, travelled, cancelled") versus US usage ("labeled, traveled, canceled"). My advice: (1) If it seems right with just 1 consonant, go with it. (2) Look it up. But avoid "focussed" and "benefitted" like the plague!

36. Word to lose: Both

GRATING: He served on both the security committee and on the social committee.

APPROPRIATE: He served on the security committee and on the social committee.

GRATING: Clients are served in both English and French.

APPROPRIATE: Clients are served in English and French.

"Both" provides no useful information unless "and" is absent: "Fax or scanned images? We handle both!"

37. **In ... from now:** Choose one!

WRONG: The meeting starts in 15 minutes from now. The report is due in six months from now.

CORRECT: The meeting starts in 15 minutes. The report is due six months from now.

38. Less is more, they say. They forgot 'fewer'.

WRONG: Less people are using the ATM in the lobby.

CORRECT: Fewer people ...

Trick: Think sugar or sweetness: "Less" is appropriate if you can scoop it from a bin or if it is an abstract concept. "Less people" would technically mean people without parts of their bodies!

CORRECT: We put less flour in the recipe. Less stress in the workplace helps productivity.

CORRECT: We put fewer people on the team this year. Fewer voters participated in the election this year than did so last year.

39. Equally as? Oh No! Make sure "equally" and "as" don't get near each other!

WRONG: Proposal A is equally as professional as Proposal B.

CORRECT: Proposal A is equal to Proposal B in quality. The two proposals are equally professional.

40. **Lead vs. led:** If it sounds like a metal, make sure there really is a metal/chemical around - as in "paint containing lead is no longer used".

WRONG: We were lead to believe ...

CORRECT: We were led to believe ...

DRILL: LEAD - LEADING - LED - LED - LEADING

At this moment, the recent findings lead us to question some assumptions. The findings are in fact leading toward a new interpretation. Last year, the extra profit led us to fund a special project. The project has led to gains several quarters in a row. The former mayor has always been and will still be leading the ceremonial procession.

SOLUTION IF YOU'RE NOT SURE: Right now, the evidence points to So far, the conclusions have pointed to ... The outcome has been a focus on ...

41. I get that sinking feeling when you mix up sank and sunk ... and mixing up drank and drunk drives me to drink!

WRONG: The economy sunk to its lowest level in ten years.

CORRECT: The economy sank ... or The economy has sunk ...

The drill is I-A-U: I drink blueberry juice for its antioxidants. She drank several bottles of water during the marathon. I'm glad the children have drunk all the milk I poured for them.

42. Word to lose: Basically. It provides no useful information and should be banned!

GRATING: Basically, the team has concluded it would be better to start the project next year.

APPROPRIATE: In summary, the team has concluded ... (or just: The team has concluded ...)

43. Is there a cure for this-itis?

When you feel tempted to use the word "this" ... look for an unambiguous formulation. Let me illustrate:

POOR: The number of emails has increased dramatically. This represents a strain on employees' time and they feel stressed. We are attempting to address this [the strain or the stress or both?] by issuing a policy. But unless everyone pays attention to this [the policy or the strain & stress?], it won't help.

CLEARER: The number of emails has increased dramatically. The increase represents a strain on employees' time and they feel stressed. We are attempting to address that strain and the resulting stress by issuing a policy. However, no policy will help unless everyone pays attention to it.

44. And is there similarly a cure for that-itis?

When you feel tempted to use the word "that" ... ask if it's truly needed.

GRATING: The attitude that she projects is contagious. I wish that I had the energy that you have. Judging from the way that the meeting is going, it could be a long one.

MORE ELEGANT: The attitude she projects is contagious. I wish I had the energy you have. Judging from the way the meeting is going, it could be a long one.

Trick: Remember the saying "the way the cookie crumbles". We don't say "the way that the cookie crumbles".

45. Wait on? Not unless it's hand and foot!

WRONG: We're waiting on the chair, so the meeting is delayed.

CORRECT: We're waiting for the chair, so ...

"Wait on" means "serve": We enjoyed the lovely dinner on the terrace - three staff were waiting on us!

Trick: Recall the play *Waiting for Godot*. Those two gentlemen were definitely not waiting "on" Godot!

46. I know, "subjunctive" sounds scary, but don't be afraid of the were-wolf - it's only there in *the imagination*.

WRONG: If I was in that situation, I would be concerned. If the meeting was held earlier, I could attend.

CORRECT: If I were in that situation, I would be concerned. I could attend if the meeting were held earlier.

And since we're on the topic of *imagined situations*, here's a real cringe-inducer:

WRONG: If the meeting had have been earlier, I could of attended.

CORRECT: If the meeting had been earlier, I could have attended.

47. Asbestos is no longer permitted in buildings. Neither should it be in your communication!

WRONG: As best as I can tell, ... We worked as best as we could.

CORRECT: As best I can tell, ... We worked as best we could.

48. Advanced or advance? It's easy: sophisticated, progressed? ... or so that there is extra time to react?

WRONG: We give advanced notice to selected customers about the upcoming event.

CORRECT: We give advance notice ... (notice in advance)

"Advanced" means ahead in comparison with something else, or moved forward or up: She is at an advanced grade level in school. The time line has been advanced so that the office cleanup will occur two weeks earlier than originally planned. The team has advanced to the provincial soccer playoffs.

49. Is there a cure for the phenomenon of "phenomena" masquerading in singular garb?

The word phenomena is plural, referring to several instances of a phenomenon (meaning incident, occurrence).

WRONG: This phenomena shows how much we must care about the environment.

CORRECT: This phenomenon shows ...

CORRECT: The melting of the polar ice and many similar phenomena illustrate how ...

50. Pour or pore: Are we reading ... or dispensing tea?

WRONG: I'm pouring over the report.

CORRECT: I'm poring over the report.

51. Myself or me? I must give "myself" a pass unless I'm giving myself a gift!

WRONG: Bob and myself thank you ... Please be in touch with Bob or myself at ...

CORRECT: Bob and I thank you ... Please be in touch with Bob or me at ...

"Myself" is correct if you are describing a situation of solitude: "I did it by myself".

52. **Predominate, Dominant. Here's a memory trick.**

WRONG: The students are predominately young. It is predominate in our school that we play instruments.

CORRECT: The students are predominantly young. It is predominant in our school ...

Predominate is something we do: Tall people predominate in basketball.

Dominant describes a state of affairs where a condition is more frequent than other conditions: The basketball team is made up predominantly of tall students.

Trick: **Predominate** is like impregnate - an action. **Dominant** is like pregnant - a condition.

53. Please let's prevent "preventative". Forever. No matter how much it rhymes with 'tentative'.

My fellow professionals, here is an easy one. Never again say or write "preventative". **The word is "preventive".**

Memory trick: It has the same sound pattern as "prevent it".

54. Latin plurals Oh wow, how scary can it get?

WRONG: An alumni of the university donated her life savings.

CORRECT: An alumna of the university ...

Male graduates: One alumnus, two alumni. Female graduates: One alumna, two alumnae.

When the meaning is "all past graduates", the masculine plural may be used: All alumni are invited ...

WRONG: Graduate school curriculums require students to provide ...

CORRECT: Graduate school curricula require students to provide ...

Due to the similarity in pronunciation, it's no wonder there's confusion between "--ae" and "--i". But "--ums" ought to give anyone pause! If in doubt, check it out ... or rephrase to avoid the conundrum: "Commonly, a curriculum requires ..."

55. If only we could get "only" in the right spot!

WRONG: I only want to stay for a few minutes. He had only worked in his new job for two weeks when the company was reorganized.

CORRECT: I want to stay for only a few minutes. He had worked in his new job for only two weeks ...

"Only" should be positioned directly in front of the word to which it pertains. In the above examples, "I only want to stay for a few minutes" technically means "I want nothing else in life than to stay ..." and "he had only worked" means he had done nothing other than work (no sleep, etc) for the two weeks.

56. It will be altogether too cramped in the car if we go all together.

WRONG: I find the shopping mall all together too busy. Once more, altogether now, let's do the chorus.

CORRECT: I find the shopping mall altogether too busy. Once more, all together ...

Trick: "Altogether" means "entirely" and it's safe to use that alternative if you're in doubt.

57. Elvis may have been "all shook up" - but we aren't taken in by it!

WRONG: The passengers were quite shook up after the collision. Should it have took that long to cook?

CORRECT: The passengers were quite shaken ("up" is optional). Should it have taken that long?

58. Here's a goner: "Have went".

WRONG: I'm amazed at your patience - I would have went crazy!

CORRECT: I would have gone crazy.

"Went" is correct as the simple past tense of "go", but it can't be combined with "have": The children went nuts when Santa arrived. If I hadn't been feeling ill, I would have gone to the meeting.

59. Let's put little "not" in its place.

WRONG: All members do not attend the annual conference. The students are not all upset.

CORRECT: Not all members attend the conference. Not all the students are upset.

Trick: Don't allow "not" to drift toward the verb. Technically, "All members do not attend" means that absolutely no one attends; "the students are not all upset" means they are something *other than* "all upset".

60. We all need a little orientation now and then ... but we sure don't need anyone "orientating" us!

Here is another easy one. Never again say or write "orientate". **The word is "orient". An instructor orients us today and oriented us yesterday.**

Trick: How would you feel if you woke up in Beijing tomorrow? Dis-orient-ed!

61. Repeat Twice. Hm? Do it twice or three times?

Technically, 'repeat twice' means something gets repeated once, then one more time, for a total of 3 events.

62. May I plead for pleaded?

WRONG: The defendant pled guilty. At the meeting yesterday, John pled ignorance of the new regulations.

CORRECT: The defendant pleaded guilty. At the meeting yesterday, John pleaded ignorance.

It's possible we mentally "hear" the past tense of bleed (bled) when we use "pled". Trust me, the past tense of "plead" is "pleaded".

63. Is it all over the map, or have payments been made?

WRONG: The funds have been dispersed. The family has members disbursed all over the world.

CORRECT: The funds have been disbursed. The family has members dispersed ...

Trick: "Disburse" means "remove from the place where the money is" (from French *bourse* meaning pouch or purse). If the idea is "spread far and wide", then use "disperse". Of course, disbursements can be dispersed to faraway places!

64. Here's an agonizing one:

WRONG: It was tortuous standing in line for so long. That logic is just too torturous for words!

CORRECT: It was torturous standing in line for so long. That logic is just too tortuous for words!

"Tortuous" means twisted and "torturous" means painful. Perhaps you want to just use those words instead!

65. Let them loose - or lose them entirely?

WRONG: At this rate, we'll soon loose all the money we allocated for playing at the casino. Losely speaking, I'd say there were 15 people in the store. Don't be a sore looser! Loseing one's wallet is a nightmare.

CORRECT: We'll lose. Loosely speaking. Don't be a sore loser! Losing one's wallet is a nightmare.

Trick: Let the double "oo" remind you of the "loose change" jangling around freely in your pocket. Hence "let them loose" means "set them free". Thus, "because he failed to close the gate, he loosed ten dogs on the neighborhood".

66. We all wait with some kind of breath, but it's not baited!

WRONG: I await your reply with baited breath. The fever has abaited.

CORRECT: I await your reply with bated breath. The fever has abated.

Baiting is what sports fishers do when they put a worm on a hook. Abatement is what happens when something decreases, so "bating" means reducing or holding back.

67. Oh, the havoc we can wreak!

WRONG: The snow storm wrought havoc with the train service. The snow storm reeked havoc ...

CORRECT: The snow storm wreaked havoc ...

Trick: "Wrought" is what some iron fences are.

68. The reign in Spain ... could not rein in the rain!

WRONG: The manager must reign in the spending. During Queen Victoria's rein, ...

CORRECT: The manager must rein in the spending. During Queen Victoria's reign, ...

Reins are straps horses wear so they can be reined in (slowed or stopped). Reigns are periods during which royals or other leaders rule.

69. Plural or Possessive or Both? From the top:

France is a **country** known for its wine. [SINGULAR]

French wine contributes significantly to the **country's** export revenues. [SINGULAR POSSESSIVE]

Denmark and Holland are **countries** known for their cheeses. [PLURAL]

Danish and Dutch cheeses contribute significantly to those two **countries'** export revenues. [PLURAL POSSESSIVE]

70. Here's an everyday challenge I see any time, every day ...

Let the old saying "Every day, in every way, I am getting better" be your guide.

Every day indicates how often something happens: I visit that coffee shop **every day**.

Everyday is an adjective meaning common, normal, mainstream: Traffic chaos is an **everyday** phenomenon in our city - it happens almost **every day**. For meetings, I wear formal clothes but my **everyday** work attire is casual.

Any time is your best bet: **Any time** it's convenient for you, just give me a call. Sure, **any time!**

(**Anytime** is so rarely correct you may safely ignore it as an option.)

71. Never mind about any interim time frame, "interm" is never on!

WRONG: In the interm, we will use temporary passes. (Yes, the "term" part is seductive, isn't it?)

CORRECT: In the interim, we will use temporary passes. (The "im" part is a separate syllable.)

72. OK let's tackle it: Precedent / precedence and incident / incidence

Precedent means there is a tradition or prior practice to go on: Once the association established the precedent of a summer meeting, subsequent boards repeated it. **Precedence** means something is prioritized above alternatives: Regardless of all the considerations, the need to save lives takes precedence.

Incident = event: The incident at the corner last night shows how important it is to obey stop signs. **Incidence** refers to how often something is happening: The incidence of lung cancer has increased.

73. Born or borne? Is childbirth involved?

Use "born" whenever childbirth is involved: Born in 1850 as the first of ten children, he ...

Borne is used in the absence of childbirth: My premonition was borne out when I saw the news. Borne out of a passion for the arts, his dedication to the music school was intense.

74. Premier or premiere? Is it first class - or opening night?

Premier means "top notch, leading": The shop is the premier provider of cheeses in the city.

Premiere means "first performance": Parents were at the music academy premiere to see their children perform.

75. Can we please get off "off of" ?

Fellow professionals, please make a pledge: **Never again** say or write "off of". "Off" is sufficient!

I'll get the figures I need **off the** statistics posted on the intranet. You may calculate **off the** tables shown above. No one can take **off me** my responsibility for my family.

76. Sneak what? You can't mean Mountain Peak!

We all know what it means to get a "sneak" - an advance - look at something. It's called a **sneak peek**. Here goes:

Peek means "look": I had a peek at the drawings and they are awesome!

Peak means "pinnacle": The team reached the peak of the mountain after 6 days of climbing.

Memory trick: A goes before E: Sneak peek.

77. Here's the note she had wrote ... NOT!

It sweetly rhymes in the country song, but it's wrong. Correctly it goes:
I write today, I wrote yesterday, I **had written** the day before.

78. Most unique, very unique: Please ... unique is unique!

Unique cannot be qualified by any other word. Something is unique or it isn't. Period.

79. Sound-the-same:

FLARE / FLAIR:

Flare = (1) erupt or (2) be wider at one point. A fire or dispute can **flare** up, and back in the 70s we wore **flared** jeans.
Flair = talent: Our new IT trainee has a real **flair** for web design. She always dresses with great **flair**.

ROLL / ROLE

Roll = (1) bundle or (2) a motion. The **roll** of wallpaper weighed more than 50 pounds. Watch out, he's on a **roll** now and won't stop for a while! He's like Cary Grant and Sylvester Stallone **rolled** up into one.

Role = position. Could you play the **role** of the employer in the mock interview? She has been highly effective in her new **role** as coordinator.

TACK / TACT

Tack = (1) short nail with flat head or (2) direction or course or strategy, as in sailboats zigzagging to move forward. [There are many other meanings, but the point here is that TACT cannot be used to mean "direction".] **Tack** that notice up on the corkboard. The sailboats are **tacking** against the wind. The **tack** we are taking is to emphasize immediate gains. I wouldn't take that **tack** if I were you.

Tact = politeness, situational finesse. The position requires a great deal of **tact** and diplomacy.

TRACK / TRACT

Track = route or path or road. The running **track** was very hard and smooth. The project is right on **track**.

Tract = (1) piece of land or (2) anatomical term. She had inherited a **tract** of forest from her parents. Fiber is good for the intestinal **tract**.

80. It's important to be attentive to detail and to have patience for detailed work.

WRONG: She's detailed oriented.

CORRECT: She's detail oriented.

81. You may certainly pass the mustard at dinner, but that is probably not what you mean when you say it!

The expression you're getting at is "pass muster" meaning *stand up to scrutiny, receive approval*. The confusion arises due to the expression "cut the mustard" meaning *be up to snuff*.

Are you sure the report will **pass muster** with the board? Wearing a cheap polyester top with sequins doesn't **cut the mustard** for a business meeting.

82. Flesh out vs. flush out: Are we putting meat on bones or activating the toilet?

Flesh out means expand, add detail, make fuller: I'll **flesh out** the outline with additional bullets. Let's discuss the matter when our information is a bit more **fleshed out**.

Flush out means to make something appear or disappear: The hunting dogs are used to **flush out** the pheasants from the shrubbery. The debris in the ditch was **flushed out** in the heavy rain.

83. Sound-the-same:

RACK / WRACK

Rack = torture. I have **racked** my brain for hours but can't remember where I put the binder.

Wrack = wreck, destroy; something washed up ashore, remains. Talk about going to **wrack** and ruin!

SITE / SIGHT

Site = place. The new **site** for the sports complex must be close to public transit.

Sight = vision or spectacle, scene. Her **sight** has deteriorated, so she needs new glasses to read. What a happy **sight**, my six grandchildren lined up at the ice cream truck!

SHEER / SHEAR

Sheer = (1) see-through or (2) pure, nothing but. The curtains are **sheer** enough that from inside, one can see cars on the street. That document is **sheer** propaganda!

Shear = cut, or scissors. It's the time of year for **shearing** the sheep. When the sheep are **shorn**, we let them sleep in the barn. The cutting **shears** are very sharp.

84. Differentiate or distinguish? A choice indeed!

WRONG: We can differentiate between the product options by using the descriptions posted on the website.

CORRECT: We can distinguish between the product options by using the descriptions posted on the website.

CORRECT: We differentiate our products according to market preferences.

Differentiation is done by a producer making different products. Distinguishing is done by viewers/customers.

85. Remember "that-itis"? Watch out for extraneous "downstream" repeated thats!

WRONG: I think that if the current parking policy is not enforced properly, that it will become a serious problem.

CORRECT: I think the current parking policy will become a serious problem if it is not enforced properly.

Tip: The fewer "thats" in your usage the better!

86. **Partake** or **participate**? Are we eating cake or pitching in?

Partake means to be part of an act of consumption - eat or drink. Participate means being active in a group activity.

There's a birthday cake for Susan in the boardroom - will you **partake**?

I have been a passive member of the association for years, but I have never **participated** in any activities.

87. **More ... than**: Watch who is doing what!

WRONG: More people read *X Magazine* than *Y Magazine and Z Magazine* combined. [Here, the Y and Z magazines are doing the reading.]

CORRECT: More people read *X Magazine* than read *Y Magazine and Z Magazine* combined.

88. "Both" comes back to haunt us ...

"The software is both Canadian and offers the flexibility to customize the screen." Ouch!!! You get the meaning, but probably sense how clumsy the formulation is. The writer no doubt meant to say something like:

The software has two strong advantages: First, it's Canadian; second, it's flexible.

Not only is the software Canadian - a big advantage; it is in addition so flexible that it offers customization.

89. To hyphenate or not to hyphenate ... that is the question.

WRONG: I'll do the work after-hours. The background for the initiative is well-known. Everyone would be nutritionally-challenged on a diet of fast food. These nutritionally-excellent muffins are very popular in the office.

CORRECT: I'll do the work after hours. The background for the initiative is well known. We'd be nutritionally challenged on a fast-food diet. These nutritionally excellent muffins are popular. This looks like an after-hours kind of job. He is a well-known customer in the coffee shop. His wife is not as well known as he is in the coffee shop.

MEMORY TRICK: If the phrase appears right before a noun, the hyphen is safe: **A well-built house is a good investment. The child had a much-loved toy.** Otherwise, leave the hyphen out: **The house was exceptionally well built. The child's toy was much loved.** Always leave out the hyphen when "-ly" is involved: **The budget has been dramatically reduced so we are in a greatly changed position.**

SOLUTION: It is better to leave the hyphen out if you are unsure because the meaning is still clear: A well built house ... Let's keep the child's much loved toy in the attic.

SUGGESTION: If in doubt, substitute a different and longer word. If you are deciding between "well-aware" and "well aware", would you be tempted to write "I am perfectly-aware" or "I am absolutely-aware"? [You shouldn't be!] So the answer is that you are well aware!

90. The subject drives the tense!

WRONG: The circuitry in our brains are incredibly complex. NO!!!!

CORRECT: "The circuitry" is the subject - singular - so the correct formulation is "the circuitry in our brains is".

WRONG: One of the key indicators are ..

CORRECT: One of the key indicators is ... [one ... is]

SUGGESTION: To avoid confusion, rephrase: "Brain circuitry is ... ".

91. Sound-the-same:

FAIR / FARE

Fair (adjective) = just, equitable, nice, pleasant

Fair (noun) = event (as in "country fair" or "arts fair")

Fare (verb) = do in life, make do, survive, get on

If the weather is not fair [nice], how can we be fair to [treat well] the children if we cancel the fair [event]? How will the children fare [manage, get on] if the fair is canceled?

92. We can't hear it, but discreet and discrete are VERY different!

Discreet implies quiet, confidentiality, subtlety, or near-secrecy: I made a discreet inquiry with a contact to verify the story. With a discreet signal, the meeting Chair let each participant know when it was time to stop talking. By all means seek out the team members' opinions - just be discreet about it. The journalist met discreetly with the politician in a local public library.

When you are discreet, you may also show discretion. Discretion refers to an ability or opportunity to decide what to make public and what to leave unshared: Team Leaders may at their discretion select topics for discussion at the monthly staff meeting. Employees who share their private information rely on the HR Manager's discretion when escalating any matter requiring attention.

Discrete means "individual, separate": Can we sort the year's receipts into discrete piles, one for each month? Should we divide the intranet front page into discrete sections for each of the 3 offices?

93. These roads are impossible to pass ... that is, they are impassable (not impassible)!

When a road, path, corridor, or any other avenue of traffic cannot be **passed through**, it is **impassable**.

Memory trick: PASS is spelled with an "a" - give it another a - impassable. "Impossible" has the O and I we see in "can't DO IT".

94. That or which? Here's a simple test.

Some believe "which" in place of "that" lends an air of sophistication to a sentence. That would be a mistaken belief! Here is a quick bottom line to summarize the technical explanations: If the information introduced by that/which could be omitted without destroying the sense, "which" is correct:

- A. The painting that was stolen a year ago is worth a fortune.
- B. The Vermeer painting, which was stolen a year ago and found last week, will now be displayed in a glass enclosure.
- C. The Vermeer painting, stolen a year ago and found last week, will now ...

In A, the information about the theft **defines the specific painting we are discussing** and thus could not be omitted. In B and C, the information about the theft **could be omitted** ("the Vermeer painting will now ...").

95. A simple, surefire method for dealing with comparisons: Supply the verb a second time!

WRONG: My sister is much taller than me.

CORRECT: My sister is much taller than I [am].

WRONG: George is more interested in sports than her. (His interest in sports is greater than his interest in her.)

CORRECT: George is more interested in sports than she [is].

WRONG: Europeans dress more chicly than us.

CORRECT: Europeans dress more chicly than we [dress].

96. Is it further or farther? Easy - you'd never be tempted to say "that's fur away from here".

Farther describes physical distance: Our new office location is farther away from public transit than the old one.

Further indicates metaphorical distance or continuation: Our new CEO's vision went much further than we had expected. Further to our discussion last week, ...

SOLUTION IF YOU'RE NOT SURE: Rephrase. The distance from public transit to the new office location is longer. The CEO's vision appeared bolder than we had expected. As a continuation from our discussion last week, ...

97. Here's a definite rule: Definate is definitively out of the question!

Just resolve never to use "definate" or "definitely".

MEMORY TRICK: "FinAL" (At Last) refers to an end point in time but not to accuracy: The document was the final draft before the board meeting, but it was full of errors.

"FinITe" and "DefinITe" and "DefinITive" refer to official approval or certainty = this is IT: The document was accepted as the definitive statement of policy.

98. Passed or past? Think groceries ... are they past their sell-by date, or have they passed your inspection?

WRONG: It is long passed the normal meeting time. It is passed time we address the matter. Passed items to be discussed again include ...

CORRECT: It is long past ... It is past time we ... Past items to be discussed ...

But don't confuse time passage with scrutiny or quality control:

There was an opportunity last month, but its time has passed. It is now a past matter.

The strawberries passed the scrutiny - they were not past the sell date.

99. Is concern a real worry? Depends on the seriousness for you.

WRONG: The project is a concern, and the time line is concerning.

CONSIDER: The project and its time line are a subject of worry.

CONSIDER: The project and its time line are a subject of interest.

A concern may simply be a matter of ownership or interest. **"It is her concern" means she is in charge; "I am concerned about ..." often means "I am focused on".**

On the other hand, a concern may be a gentle worry or a focused attention: **Should we be concerned about the parking violations if the residents don't complain?**

100. Doing good by doing well - what a nice combination!

WRONG: Bob is doing good in math. Karen played the piano so good! The reception went really good.

CORRECT: Bob is doing well in math. Karen played the piano so well! The reception went really well.

WRONG: How are you doing these days? I'm doing good, thanks! [Or, commonly now: "I'm good!"]

CORRECT: I'm doing well, thanks!

Doing good (opposite of harm) refers to a positive impact: "The new recycling program is doing a lot of good for the neighborhood in terms of reducing litter".

Doing well (opposite of poorly) - in school, at work, at a project, and so on - refers to the way in which an activity is done: "The new town council has done so well in reducing duplicated services that funds are now available ..."