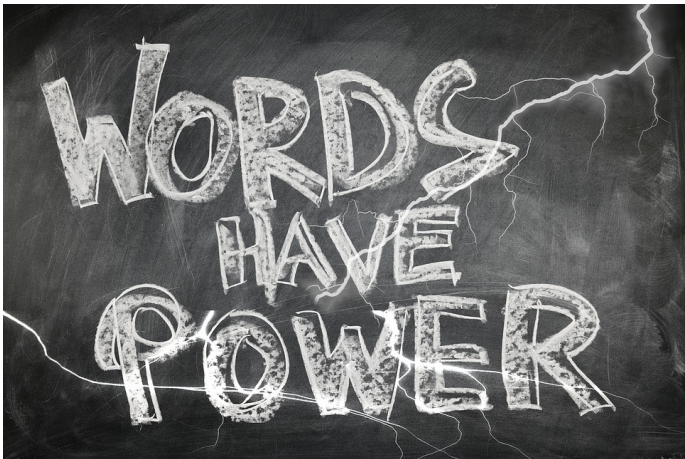


Word Choice Handout and Practice



Most writers’ problems with word choice come from trying to use words they do not know. At times, you may feel the pressure to use vocabulary that is ‘fancy’ or ‘smart.’ However, using words whose meanings you are not sure of may change your ideas radically. Misspelling a word may also confuse readers. Before using a word you are not sure about, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1. Am I sure this is the right word to express my idea?
- 2. To the best of my knowledge, did I spell it correctly?
- 3. Is the word appropriate for this text and my audience?
- 4. If I am not sure about the word I am trying to use, is there another word I can replace it with?

At times, you may also be concerned about reducing the number of mistakes in your writing to obtain a good grade. In such cases, it is best to look up the words you do not know. If you are not allowed to look them up, take a safer approach and replace them with another word you know.

The following sections will help you make more informed decisions about choosing words for your texts.

Denotation and Connotation

Words may carry a **denotative** (literal) meaning or a **connotative** (figurative, implied) meaning. For example, when writing a description of the place you live in, you may call it a *home*, a *house*, or a *residence*. These three words **denote** or indicate the same place. However, their **connotative** meaning is different. *Home* refers to a warmer place than *house*. *Residence* probably carries very little feeling compared to the other two words. **Connotative** meanings of words may be positive, negative, or sometimes neutral, depending on what you are writing and who you are writing for. For example, informal words that may carry a neutral or positive connotation in a letter to a friend may have a negative connotation in an argumentative essay. In this lesson and practice exercises, assume your audience expects an academic tone.

Consider both denotative and connotative meanings of a word before using it. Some words have a negative connotation, and they may not be appropriate for your text.

The table below contains words with both positive and negative connotations when used in an argumentative essay. Read and compare them.

Positive connotation	Possible negative connotation
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Boy, men, people	Dude (also used informally)
Natural	Plain
Child	Kid
Inexpensive, thrifty	Cheap
Teenager	Punk
Girl, woman, people	Chick(s)

Review Questions

Assuming your readers expect an academic tone, replace the section(s) in bold with other words carrying a more positive connotation:

1. **The folks at my school** voted against having makeup classes on Saturday.
2. When I asked my little brother if he was **hooked on** video games, he **went**, 'Of course I am not!'
3. She approached the **dude** who was standing by the door, and they started talking; then they **chilled** for a while.

Misspelling

Misspelling words can also cause you problems, especially if you write a word that looks similar to the one you wanted but carries a different meaning. The best way to avoid misspellings is to become familiarized with the words you often use.

You should also double check the words suggested by the spell check application on your word processor. Although these programs catch common misspellings, they sometimes make wrong suggestions or simply miss misspelled words.

A few hints to help you avoid spelling errors.

- ***Make flash cards with the words you frequently use in your essays but have problems spelling. Seeing them often will help you memorize them.***
- ***Keep a vocabulary list at the end of your notebook containing both new words and words you have a hard time spelling.***

acknowledge	dependent	judgment	receipt
accidentally	embarrass	length	regardless
awkward	existence	liaison	religious



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acknowledgement	forfeit	license	separate
argument	fourth	maintenance	specifically
basically	fulfill	negotiable	sufficient
commitment	guarantee	occasion	temperament
consensus	harass	occurrence	truly
convenient	independence	opportunity	unanimous
definitely	indispensable	parallel	usually
descend	insufficient	perseverance	vengeance
desperate	interrupt	Proceed	withhold

Review Questions

Choose the word with the correct spelling. The words in this practice may not be in the table above, and you may have to use a dictionary to learn their correct spelling.

1. Lack of water and fire extinguishers in the room (aggravated/agravated) the fire.
2. Their (analysis/analisis) of the problem was accurate.
3. My parents say that my curfew is not (negociable/negotiable).
4. The history teacher was irritated when she talked about the (omission/omision) of an important fact in the students' exam responses.
5. Lawmakers (recomended/recommended) the bill be changed before the final vote.

Gender Bias

Writers need to make sure they address readers in a respectful and unbiased manner. One way to do it is by carefully choosing your nouns and pronouns. For example, when you address people in general, readers will interpret the exclusive use of *he*, *him*, and *his* or *she* and *her* as biased. The suggestions below will help you avoid **gender bias** in your essays.

Below is a table of suggestions to avoid gender bias.

1. **Rephrase the sentence:**

- A teacher must consider the background of his students (biased).
- A teacher must consider the students' backgrounds (unbiased).

2. **Use plural nouns or pronouns, or use "gender-free" nouns, such as person, individual, child, etc:**

- A student knows he must do his homework (biased).
- Students know they have to do their homework (unbiased).
- Teachers must consider the backgrounds of their students (unbiased).



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3. If the noun you are using is a profession that carries gender (eg. steward, stewardess), use the gender-free variation (eg. flight attendant):

- All salesmen were required to attend the meeting (biased).
- All salespeople were required to attend the meeting (unbiased).

4. Replace the pronoun “he” with “one”, “you”, “we”, or use “he or she” (do not overuse them):

- When a student finished his exam early, he could leave the room (biased).
- When a student finished his or her exam early, he or she could leave the room (unbiased).

5. Take turns using “he or she” when it does not confuse readers:

- If you are a teacher, you should ask yourself if every child in your room has been spoken to directly. Ask if he has already washed his hands, if she has finished her homework. The goal is to use everyday habitual information to start conversations.

When avoiding gender bias, use the strategies that best fit your personal style, but try not to overuse them.

Review Questions

Rewrite the sentences below and eliminate their gender bias. Refer to the strategies seen above:

1. Each doctor will explain her own procedures.
2. When you call the technician, tell him the computer broke yesterday.
3. According to the guidelines, a writer needs to publish her manuscript in order to be eligible for the grant.
4. If I ever meet a congressman, I will tell him how upset I am with politics at the national level.
5. When a doctor wants to order gloves, she must speak to the office staff.



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