



Editors Cite Common Writing Errors

A list of common errors in newspaper writing as prepared by the Writing and Editing Committee of the Associated Press Managing Editors Association.

1. **Affect, effect.** Generally, AFFECT is the verb; EFFECT is the noun. “The letter did not AFFECT the outcome.” But EFFECT is also a verb meaning to bring about. Thus: “It is almost impossible to EFFECT a change.”
2. **Afterward, afterwards.** The dictionary allows use of AFTERWARDS only as a second form. The same thinking applies to TOWARD and TOWARDS. Use TOWARD.
3. **All right.** That’s the way to spell it. The dictionary may list ALRIGHT as a legitimate word, but it is not acceptable in standard usage, says Random House.
4. **Allude, elude.** You ALLUDE to (or mention) a book. You ELUDE (or escape) a pursuer.
5. **Annual.** Don’t use first with it. If it’s the first time, it can’t be annual.
6. **Averse, adverse.** If you don’t like something, you are AVERSE (or opposed) to it. ADVERSE is an adjective: ADVERSE (bad) weather, ADVERSE conditions.
7. **Block, bloc.** A BLOC is a coalition of persons or a group with the same purpose or goal. Don’t call it a BLOCK, which has some 40 dictionary definitions.
8. **Compose, comprise.** Remember that the parts COMPOSE the whole and the whole is COMPRISED of the parts. You COMPOSE things by putting them together. Once the parts are put together, the object COMPRISES or is COMPRISED of the parts.
9. **Different from.** Things and people are different FROM each other. Don’t write that they are different THAN each other.
10. **Drown.** Don’t say someone was DROWNED unless an assailant held the victim’s head under water. Just say the victim DROWNED.
11. **Due to, owing to, because of.** We prefer the last.
Wrong: The game was canceled DUE TO rain.
Stilted: OWING TO rain, the game was canceled.
Right: The game was canceled BECAUSE OF rain.
12. **Ecology, environment.** They are not synonymous. ECOLOGY is the study of the relationship between organisms and their ENVIRONMENT.
Right: The laboratory is studying the ECOLOGY of man and the desert.
Right: There is much interest in animal ECOLOGY these days.
Wrong: Even so simple an undertaking as maintaining a lawn affects ECOLGOY.
Right: Even so simple an undertaking as maintaining a lawn affects our ENVIORNMENT.
13. **Either.** It means one or the other, not both.
Wrong: There were lions on EITHER side of the door.
Right: There were lions on EACH side of the door.
14. **Fliers, flyers.** Airmen are FLIERS. Handbills are FLYERS.

15. **Flout, flaunt.** They aren't the same words; they mean completely different things and they're very commonly confused.
FLOUT means to mock, to scoff or to show disdain for.
FLAUNT means to display ostentatiously.
16. **Head up.** People don't HEAD UP committees. They HEAD them.
17. **Imply and infer.** The speaker implies. The hearer infers.
18. **In advance of, prior to.** Use before; it sounds more natural.
19. **It's, its.** ITS is the possessive, IT'S is the contraction of IT IS.
Wrong: What is IT'S name?
Right: What is ITS name? ITS name is Fido.
Right: IT'S the first time he's scored tonight.
Right: IT'S my coat.
20. **Lay, lie.** Lay is the action word; lie is the state of being.
Wrong: The body will LAY in state until Wednesday.
Right: The body will LIE in state until Wednesday.
Right: The prosecutor tried to LAY the blame on him.
However, the past tense of LIE is LAY.
Right: The body LAY in state from Tuesday until Wednesday.
Wrong: The body LAID in stated from Tuesday until Wednesday.
The past participle and the plain past tense of LAY is LAID.
Right: He LAID the pencil on the pad.
Right: He HAD LAID the pencil on the pad.
Right: The hen LAID an egg.
21. **Peddle, pedal.** When selling something, you PEDDLE it. When riding a bicycle or similar form of locomotion, you PEDAL it.
22. **Pretense, pretext.** They're different, but it's a tough distinction. A PRETEXT is that which is put forward to conceal a truth.
He was discharged for tardiness, but this was only a PRETEXT for general incompetence.
A PRETENSE is a "false show"; a more overt act intended to conceal personal feelings.
My profuse complements were all PRETENSE.
23. **Principle, principal.** A guiding rule or basic truth is a PRINCIPLE. The first dominant, or leading thing is PRINCIPAL. PRINCIPLE is a noun. PRINCIPAL may be a noun or an ADJECTIVE.
Right: It's the PRINCIPLE of the thing.
Right: Liberty and justice are two PRINCIPLES on which our nation is founded.
Right: Hitting and fielding are the PRINCIPAL activities in baseball.
Right: Robert Jamison is the school PRINCIPAL.
24. **Redundancies to avoid.**
Easter Sunday. Make it EASTER.
Incumbent Congressman. CONGRESSMAN.
Owns his own home. OWNS HIS HOME.
The company will close down. THE COMPANY WILL CLOSE.
Jones, Smith, Johnson and Reid were all convicted.

JONES, SMITH, JOHNSON AND REID WERE CONVICTED.

Jewish rabbi. Just RABBI.

8p.m. tonight. All you need is 8 TONIGHT or 8p.m. TODAY.

During the winter months. DURING THE WINTER.

Both Reid and Jones were denied pardons.

REID AND JONES WERE DENIED PARDONS.

I am currently tired. I AM TIRED.

Autopsy to determine the cause of death. AUTOPSY.

25. **Refute.** The word connotes success in argument and almost always implies an editorial judgment.
Wrong: Father Bury REFUTED the arguments of the proabortion faction.
Right: Father Bury responded to the arguments of the proabortion faction.
26. **Reluctant, reticent.** If he doesn't want to act, he is RELUCTANT. If he doesn't want to speak, he is RETICENT.
27. **Slang.** Don't try to use 'with-it' slang. Usually a term is on the way out by the time we get it in print.
Wrong: The police cleared the demonstrators with a sunrise bust.
28. **Leave, let.** LEAVE ALONE means to depart from or cause to be in solitude. LET ALONE means to be undisturbed.
Wrong: The man had pulled a gun on her but Mr. Jones intervened and talked him into LEAVING HER ALONE.
Right: The man had pulled a gun on her but Mr. Jones intervened and talked him into LETTING HER ALONE.
Right: When I entered the room I saw that Jim and Mary were sleeping so I decided to LEAVE THEM ALONE.
29. **Less, fewer.** If you can separate items in the quantities being compared, use FEWER. If not, use LESS.
Wrong: The Rams are inferior to the Vikings because they have LESS good linemen.
Right: The Rams are inferior to the Vikings because they have FEWER good linemen.
Right: The Rams are inferior to the Vikings because they have LESS experience.
30. **Like, as.** Don't use LIKE for AS or AS IF. In general, use LIKE to compare with nouns and pronouns; use AS when comparing with phrases and clauses that contain a verb.
Wrong: Jim blocks the linebacker LIKE he should.
Right: Jim blocks the linebacker AS he should.
Right: Jim blocks LIKE a pro.
31. **Mean, average, median.** Use mean as synonymous with AVERAGE. Each word refers to the sum of all components divided by the number of components. MEDIAN is the number that has as many components above it as below it.
32. **Nouns.** There's a growing trend toward using them as verbs. Resist it. HOST, HEADQUARTERS and AUTHOR, for instance, are nouns even though the dictionary may acknowledge they can be used as verbs. If you do, you'll come up with a monstrosity like: "Headquartered at his country home, John Doe hosted a party to celebrate the book he had authored."
33. **Oral, verbal.** Use ORAL when use of the mouth is central to the thought; the word emphasizes the idea of human utterance. VERBAL may apply to spoken or written words; it connotes the process of reducing ideas to writing. Usually, it's a VERBAL contract, not an ORAL one, if it's in writing.

34. **Over and more than.** They aren't interchangeable. OVER refers to spatial relationships: The plane flew OVER the city. MORE THAN is used with figures: In the crowd were MORE THAN 1,000 fans.
35. **Parallel construction.** Thoughts in series in the same sentence require parallel construction.
Wrong: The union delivered demands for an increase of 10 percent in wages and to cut the work week to 30 hours.
Right: The union delivered demands for an increase of 10 percent in wages and for a REDUCTION in the work week to 30 hours.
36. **SPELLING.** It's basic. If reporters can't spell and copy editors can't spell, we're in trouble. Some ripe ones for the top of your list:
CONSENSUS, not concensus.
RESTAURANTEUR, not restaurateur.
DIETITIAN, not dietician.
37. **Temperatures.** They may get higher or lower, but they don't get warmer or cooler.
Wrong: Temperatures are expected to warm up in the area Friday.
Right: Temperatures are expected to rise in the area Friday.
38. **That, which.** THAT tends to restrict the reader's thought and direct it the way you want it to go. WHICH is nonrestrictive, introducing a bit of subsidiary information. For instance: The lawnmower that is in the garage needs sharpening. (Meaning: We have more than one lawnmower. The one in the garage needs sharpening.)
The lawnmower, which is in the garage, needs sharpening. (Meaning: Our lawnmower needs sharpening. It's in the garage.)
The statue, which graces our entry hall, is on loan. (Meaning: Our statue is on loan. It happens to be in the entry hall.)
Note that which clauses take commas, signaling they are not essential to the meaning of the sentence.
39. **Unique.** Something that is unique is the only one of its kind. It can't be very unique or quite unique or somewhat unique or rather unique. Don't use it unless you really mean unique.
40. **Up.** Don't use it as a verb.
Wrong: The manager said he would UP the price next week.
Right: The manager said he would RAISE the price next week.
41. **Who, Whom.** A tough one, but generally you're safe to use WHOM to refer to someone who has been the object of an action.
A 19-year-old woman, to WHOM the room was rented, left the window open.
A 19-year-old woman WHO rented the room, left the window open.
42. **Who's, whose.** Though it incorporates an apostrophe, WHO'S is not a possessive. It's a contraction for WHO IS. WHOSE is the possessive.
Wrong: I don't know WHO'S coat it is.
Right: I don't know WHOSE coat it is.
Right: Find out WHO'S there.
43. **Would.** Be careful about using WOULD when construction a conditional past tense.
Wrong: If Soderholm WOULD NOT HAVE HAD an injured foot, Thompson wouldn't have been in the lineup.
Right: If Soderholm HAD NOT had an injured foot, Thompson wouldn't have been in the lineup.