

Dealing with Tricky Words

Farther/Further

Farther usually describes distances. Further usually suggests quantity or degree.

San Francisco is farther from Nashville than Memphis.
You should have expanded your argument further in this paper.

Toward/Towards

Toward and towards are used interchangeably, though toward is preferred in American English.

Who/Whom

Who is used as the subject of a sentence. Whom is either the object of the verb or the object of a preposition.

Who is my instructor?
"To whom should I give this paper?"

Lay/Lie

Lie is an intransitive verb. It does not take an object.

I lie down. [The past tense is lay: "I lay down." The past participle is lain: "I have lain down."]

Lay is a transitive verb. It must take an object.

I lay the book down. [The past tense is laid: "I laid it down." The past participle is laid, "I have laid it down."]

That/Which

Strictly speaking, *that* is a restrictive relative clause and *which* is a non-restrictive relative clause. *That* narrows a category or identifies a particular object and in so doing provides necessary information. *Which* provides additional information not needed to identify a particular object.

i.e. and e.g.

The Latin abbreviation **i.e.** stands for *id est* and is roughly equivalent to *that is*, or *that is to say*, or *in other words*. *i.e.* is used to clarify or provide a definition for a previous part of the sentence. Example: I'm going to the place where I work best, *i.e.*, the coffee shop.

The Latin abbreviation **e.g.** stands for *exempli gratia* which means "for example" (but can also be thought of as "example given"). It is used to provide examples. Example: Humans have several innate abilities, *e.g.*, language learning, walking, and recognizing faces.

Affect/Effect

The verb *affect* means "to influence" or "have an effect on." The noun *affect* means feeling or emotion. The noun *effect* means outcome or result. The verb *effect* means "to make happen" or "to produce." The verb form of *affect* and noun form of *effect* are more common.

Was/Were

Was and *were* are both the past tense of *to be*. *Was* is the first and third person singular form of the infinitive *to be* when used in the indicative mood. (I was. He was.) *Were* is the second person and the first and third person plural form of the infinitive *to be* when used in the indicative mood. (You were. We were. They were.) However, *were* can also be present tense when it is the first, second, or third person form (both plural and singular) of the infinitive *to be* when used in the subjunctive mood. One should **NEVER** use *was* in the present subjunctive: If I was a rich man. I wish I was in Tahiti. Rather one should use *were*: If I were a richman. I wish I were in Tahiti.

FOR A FULL GLOSSARY OF TROUBLESOME WORDS, SEE THE *CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE* §5.202