

1101 "THOU SHALT NOT" (TSN) LIST

1. Dangling prepositions – "Where do you live at?"
4. Coulda, woulda, could of, would of (use could have/would have)
5. Contractions
6. A lot/lots
7. Alright (not a word)
8. OK
9. Thing
10. You
11. "Plus" as a connector. Not "Plus, he was afraid of snakes."
Use "Moreover, he was afraid of snakes."
12. i (lower case not acceptable for personal pronoun)
13. "I, personally" = redundant
13. In my opinion (It is your paper; all analysis is your opinion)
14. etc. Use "and similar considerations" or something similar
16. Not hisself/ourself/theirself (use himself/ourselves/themselves)
17. Not "The reason why I think this is because..." (4 unnecessary words)
Use "I think this because..."
18. "each and every" This is redundant. "Each" means "every."
19. Cliches, such as "last but not least," "bottom line," "at the end of the day," "what goes around comes around"
20. At this point in time (or "at the present time," or "at this moment in time")
21. "In today's society," "In the world today," "On this planet of ours,"
"Throughout history"

22. "With all due respect"
23. "In all reality," "in actuality"
24. "To begin with," "Let me begin by saying..."
25. "It is to be thought"
26. "Thanks in advance"
27. "Just sayin"
28. "having said that," "being as I have..."
29. "We, as human beings"
30. "All things considered"
31. "Conversate"
32. "Irregardless"
33. "I have went"
34. "Use to" should be "used to"
35. "Suppose to" should be "supposed to"
36. Use a good grammar (e.g., Prentice Hall Reference Guide, pp. 222-232, and Purdue Owl) to differentiate the following and more.

As, as if, as though, like

It's, its

Than, then

Their, there, they're

To, too, two

Were, we're, where

Who, whom

Who's, whose

Your, you're

Some Words You Just Might Be Mixing Up

affect and effect

We tend to use these words interchangeably, but they do not mean the same thing. In most cases *affect* is a **verb**, as in the sentence, “Sad movies *affect* me deeply.” *Effect* is usually a **noun**, as in the sentence, “The drug has a side *effect* associated with it.”

accept and except

To *accept* is a **verb** and it means to receive or to take. *Except* is a **preposition** meaning “not including.” So, for example, a testy hot dog vendor might say, “I *accept* [verb with an ‘a’] all US currency; *except* [preposition with an ‘e’] for big bills, and wheat pennies.”

allusion and illusion

To make an *allusion* is to refer back to something, often to a cultural product like a book or a movie. If someone grumbled in an Irish-accent, “you’re a wizard, Harry; and a thumpin’ good one, I’d wager,” that person is make an *allusion* to the *Harry Potter* series. If that same person seems to pull a rabbit out of a hat, he is making an *illusion*.

bemused and amused

Although some might think that *bemuse* is similar to *amuse*, the words are actually quite different. Most are comfortable with the definition of *amused*: it means to be entertained or to smile. But to be *bemused* is to be puzzled, or bewildered. Although a student might be *bemused* by a Calculus test, he or she would probably not find such a test *amusing*.

breathe and breath

Breathe (with an ‘e’) is a **verb**; *breath* (no e) is a **noun**. So we might say, “Donna *breathed* [past tense **verb**] deeply. She took a deep *breath* [**noun**].”

capitol and capital

The words are both **nouns**, but a *capitol* [with an ‘o’] is a building; a *capital* [with an ‘a’] is a city. A person could write, “Our *capitol* [the US Capitol building] is in our *capital* [Washington, DC].”

complimentary and complementary

This one is a tiny bit trickier as *complimentary* is an **adjective** with two definitions. It can mean “to give praise,” as in, “Susan liked my new tie; she was quite *complimentary*.” Or, it can mean “to be given free of charge,” as in, “We got *complimentary* tickets to the Motörhead show since my uncle is Lemmy’s podiatrist.” *Complementary* refers to something that works well with something else, as in, “Notice how the bass line is *complementary* to the guitar solo in this song.”

converse and converse

This one is easy: to *converse* means to talk with someone. To *converse* is a recently made-up word that has no recognized meaning in Standard Academic English. Simply avoid using “*converse*” and use *converse* in its place.

e.g, and i.e.

We can thank English's Latin roots for this pair of confusing words. *E.g.* means "for example," and *i.e.*, means, "that is." A writer could state, "Look at any state in the Mid-Atlantic region; *e.g.*, [for example] Maryland." Similarly, another writer might state, "I found what I needed to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, *i.e.*, [*that is*] peanut butter, bread, jelly, and a knife."

eminent and imminent

To be *eminent* is an adjective meaning famous and well-respected. *Imminent* is an **adjective** meaning about to take place. For example, if the famous astronomer Neil deGrasse Tyson was scheduled to speak at 7:30 PM and it was 7:25 PM, we could say that the talk by the *eminent* astronomer was *imminent*.

farther and further

Both words are **adverbs**, but they are used in different ways. In most cases *farther* refers to distance and *further* refers to time. A person might live "*farther* down the road," but he or she might refer to the elementary school years as "*further* back in time."

fewer and less

To understand the difference *fewer* and *less* the concept of **count nouns** must be understood. Not surprisingly, a **count noun** is a noun that can be counted: concrete things like people, trucks, and Phillips-head screws. **Non-count nouns** are abstract things that cannot be counted: honor, love, fun. With that in mind, *fewer* is used solely for **count nouns** and *less* is used solely for **non-count nouns**.¹

flaunt and flout

To *flaunt* is to show something off in an obvious way as to draw attention to it. For example, if an athlete is awarded a championship ring and he constantly waves his hand as to draw attention to the ring, he could be said to be *flaunting* the ring. To *flout* something is to boldly ignore a rule or law. If students light cigarettes right under a blue "No Smoking" sign, then they could be said to be *flouting* Gordon's no smoking policy.

imply and infer

The difference between these two verbs is simple: *implying* is done by the speaker; *inferring* is done by the listener. For example, if one roommate notes, "That's your third dessert tonight," the dessert lover could reply, "Are you *implying* I eat too many sweets?" The speaker could then retort, "No, I think you are *inferring* too much from my statement."

its and it's

Its [no apostrophe] is an adjective meaning "belonging or relating to a certain thing." *It's* is a **contraction** for "it is." Therefore, we could state, "It's [**contraction** meaning 'it is'] true that the dog broke *its* [the leg belonging to the dog] leg."

¹ That means that the signs at the quick checkout lanes of most grocery stores are, in fact, wrong: they should read "ten items or fewer" since "items" can be counted. Feel free to bring that up the next time you visit the Barnesville Ingles.

lay and lie

Arguably the toughest pair of words to keep straight, correct usage of *lay* and *lie* depends on what **verb tense** is being used. In the **present tense** it is important to remember that *lay* is a **transitive verb**, so it needs an object. Therefore, we would write: I *lay* the book on the desk. *Lie* is an **intransitive verb**², so it cannot take an **object**. Therefore, we would write: “I feel woozy; I need to *lie* on the bed.”³

As complicated as *lay* and *lie* are in the **present tense**, unfortunately it gets even more confusing when we move to the **past tense**. The **past tense** of *lie* is actually *lay*, so even though “I *lie* in bed” is correct in the **present tense**, in the past we would have to make it “As I *lay* in bed earlier this morning...” The past tense of *lay* is *laid*: for example, “When Dr. Venus *laid* down my second draft, I could tell by his smile it was better.

The **past participle tense** does not make things any easier. The **past participle** of *lay* is *lain*. One could write, “Crumpet the cat has *lain* in the kitchen’s sunniest spot for over two hours.” The **past participle** of *lie* is *lay* (just like it is in the **past tense**) so we would write, “She had *lay* in bed since the accident.”

literally and figuratively

If a writer uses *literally*, he or she should do a quick double check and ask, “did this *actually* happen; or am I exaggerating?” This is because *literally* means *actually*. If a person states, “When I heard that they broke up my head *literally* exploded,” that person is either using the word incorrectly or dead. *Figuratively* means “*emblematically*” or “*metaphorically*;” in other words, *not literally*.⁴

me, myself, and I

As Beyonce taught us, this trio of words all mean the same thing. However, they function in radically different ways in a sentence. *I* is always a **subject**: in the sentence “I went to the movies.” *Me* is a pronoun and it always forms an **object** as in “she’s with me.” *Myself* is an **objective pronoun** and its use is limited to the writer or the speaker referring to his own person as in, “with all the increases in college fees, I do not have enough money to feed and clothe *myself*.”

principle and principal

Principal is an **adjective** meaning “most important.” With that in mind it is easy to see how the term became associated with a school’s boss –the *principal* is the most important educator on a high school campus. *Principle* with an ‘e’ is a **noun** meaning

² Of course, *lie* can also mean “to tell an untruth”, but let us put that aside for now.

³ Even if you struggle with *lie* and *lay* you are in good company. Eric Clapton’s song “Lay Down Sally” means that he wants someone to pick Sally up and put her down somewhere—probably not what he meant. Similarly, Bob Dylan’s “Lay Lady, Lay” should be “Lie Lady, Lie.”

⁴ It should be noted that this definition of *literally* seems to be in the process of changing. A recent version of *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* lists a secondary definition of *literally* as “in effect,” or, “virtually.” However, formal academic English should keep to the original definition for the foreseeable future. In academic writing, it is almost always better to adopt the “old fashioned” approach.

“moral or ethical rule”. Therefore one could have a *principal principle*—say, treating all with respect and kindness.

set and sit

Standard usage of *Set* and *sit*, like *that* and *who*, differentiates between human beings and objects. People *sit* (an **intransitive verb**); objects are *set* (a **transitive verb**). Although you might hear, “I am going to *set* myself down and read the paper,” that construction is actually a non-standard one and should be avoided while writing in Standard Academic English. Since *set* is a **transitive verb**, it has to have an **object**: “I *set* my coffee cup on the table.”

than and then

Than is a **conjunction** used to show a relationship between two other **nouns** as in the sentence, “Steve is taller than Marty.” *Then* is an **adverb** meaning “at that time” or is used to describe what happened next. For example, “The 1980s were an interesting time; *then* a portable phone was as big as a shoe box.” *Then* came the 1990s, with less expensive and more powerful cell phones.”

that and which

The problem with these two pronouns is not so much their meaning, but when to use them. *That* should be used in independent clauses. *Which* is parenthetical—the sentence could exist just fine without it. So, for example, we could write, “The car *that* ran over my foot was blue.” But by the same token we would write, “The car, *which* was blue, ran over my foot.”

that and who

That is only used for things; *who* is only used for people. This can be tricky because in informal contexts, we use *that* for people all the time. But in Standard Academic English we should write, “Are you the person *who* (not “*that*”) sits behind me in Western Civilization?”

their, there, and they’re

Their is an adjective meaning, “of or relating to certain people.” We could say, “Atlanta residents love *their* Falcons.” *There* is an **adverb** meaning, “at that location.” If we were standing across the street from the Georgia Dome, we could say, “The Falcons play over *there*.” *They’re* is a **contraction** of two words: *they* and *are* as in “*They’re* going to win the NFC South this year.”

too, to, and two

Too is an adverb meaning “to an excessive degree” as “the music was *too* loud for me.” *To* is a preposition used to indicate direction or location as, “We drove *to* my house.” *Two* is an adjective representing the second as, “I have *two* part-time jobs.” We can even use all three of them in the same sentence: “By *two* o’clock [the hour after one] in the morning Steve was *too* drunk [that is, excessively drunk] *to* [where? home] drive home.

your and you're

Your is an **adjective** meaning “of or relating to you.” *You're* is a **contraction** of two words: *you* and *are*. We might ask, “Is that *your* car?” meaning, “is that the car that belongs to you?” Similarly, we might state, “So *you're* [meaning *you are*] a SUV owner.” One way to avoid confusion when using these tricky words is to take the contraction out of the equation and think of *you're* as *you are*.