

Commonly Misused Words, Part II

Allude/Elude

- **Allude** is a verb meaning “to make indirect reference.”
Example: In his creative writing, Andrew often *alludes* to Shakespeare’s most famous plays.
- **Elude** is a verb meaning “to evade or escape from.”
Example: The suspect *eluded* the police and fled the crime scene.

Complement/Compliment

- **Complement** is a noun meaning “a thing that completes or brings to perfection.”
Example: Red wine is a fantastic *complement* to a good meal.
- **Compliment** is a noun meaning “a polite expression of praise or admiration.”
Example: John gave Sarah several *compliments* on her new shoes.
- When **complement** is used as a verb, it means “to complete or enhance by providing something additional.”
Example: The flavor of red wine *complements* a turkey dinner.
- When **compliment** is used as a verb, it means “to pay a compliment to.”
Example: Noticing her new shoes, John *complimented* Sarah’s outfit.
- **Complimentary** can be an adjective meaning “free of charge.”
Example: The hotel puts *complimentary* bottles of water in every room.

Critique/Critic

- **Critique** is a noun meaning “a critical review or commentary.”
Example: I am required to write a *critique* of my favorite film.
- **Critic** is a noun meaning “one who forms or expresses judgment.”
Example: Roger Ebert was a popular film *critic*.
- When **critique** is used as a verb, it means “to review or discuss critically.”
Example: Red Letter Media *critiques* new movie releases.

Desert/Dessert

- **Desert** is a noun meaning “arid land with sparse vegetation.”
Example: The Mojave *Desert* occupies parts of Utah, Arizona, Nevada, and California.
- **Dessert** is a noun meaning “a usually sweet course or dish usually served at the end of a meal.”
Example: My favorite *dessert* is cheesecake.

Ensure/Insure

- **Ensure** is a verb meaning “to make sure, certain, or safe.”
Example: Airline companies take several precautions to *ensure* the safety of their passengers.
- **Insure** is a verb meaning “to provide or obtain insurance on or for.”
Example: I *insured* my house against rockslide damage.

Later/Latter

- **Later** is an adverb meaning “at some time subsequent to a given time.”
Example: Viktor Fasth played his first National Hockey League (NHL) game on January 26, 2013, against the Nashville Predators. Three games *later*, he recorded his first ever NHL shutout in a game against the Colorado Avalanche.
- **Latter** is an adjective meaning “more advanced in time” or “being the second mentioned of two.”
Example: Though Teemu Selanne accomplished great things during his first few years in the National Hockey League, he achieved much more in the *latter* stages of his career.

Farther/Further

- **Farther** is an adverb meaning “at or to a greater distance or more advanced point.” Use *farther* to express physical distance.
Example: After driving for hours, we realized San Diego was *farther* than we had originally thought.
- **Further** is an adverb meaning “to a greater degree or extent.” Use *further* when referencing metaphorical or figurative distance.
Example: To get a good grade on my test, I need to study *further*.

Wary/Weary

- **Wary** is an adjective meaning “marked by keen caution, cunning, and watchfulness especially in detecting and escaping danger.”
Example: As children, we are told to be *wary* of strangers.
- **Weary** is an adjective meaning “exhausted in strength, endurance, vigor, or freshness.”
Example: The old man was *weary* from years of construction work.

Common Word Choice Errors

- **Addicting:** When something “causes or characterizes addiction,” describe it as being *addictive*. Do NOT use *addicting* in place of *addictive*.
Correct example: Television is *addictive*.
- **Literally:** *Literally* means “without exaggeration.” Only use *literally* when you want to describe something exactly how it happened. Do NOT use *literally* to exaggerate.
Incorrect example: “Her head *literally* exploded!”

- **Irony:** *Irony* is used to express that something happened contrary to expectations. For example, it would be ironic if a fire station caught on fire. Do NOT use irony to suggest coincidence. For example, it is NOT ironic if a lazy student receives a bad grade on an assignment.

Activity

Choose the correct word in the following sentences.

1. The book I am reading **alludes/eludes** to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.
2. The airline service provided several **complementary/complimentary** gifts to comfort passengers.
3. Painters and graphic designers constantly use **complementary/complimentary** colors.
4. Don't be such a **critique/critic**.
5. Because I am dieting, I will skip **desert/dessert**.
6. The professor **insured/ensured** the class that the homework is easy.
7. The waitress asked me if I wanted a soda or a beer; I preferred the **later/latter**.
8. That couldn't be **further/farther** from the truth.
9. Be **wary/weary** of wild animals.
10. Video games are **addicting/addictive**.

Answer Key for Activity

1. alludes
2. complimentary
3. complementary
4. critic
5. dessert
6. ensured
7. latter
8. further
9. wary
10. addictive

References

"Commonly Misused Words and Phrases." *Commonly Misused Words and Phrases*. Weber State University, n.d. Web. 09 June 2014.

Dictionary.com. Dictionary.com, n.d. Web. 01 Feb. 2013.