

The Lightning Bug vs. the Lightning

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Here's what the great American writer Mark Twain wrote about the importance of choosing the correct word: "The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter—it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."

The English language includes many words that are easy to confuse or misuse. Take the short quiz below from AMA's new [Business Grammar Workshop](#) to test your knowledge of which word to use when. Then read the answers and explanations to make sure you don't use lightning bug when you really mean lightning.

Exercise: Choosing the Right Word

Choose the correct word in each bracketed pair.

1. Andrew decided to [accept • except] [your • you're] proposal.
2. Barbara seemed [anxious • eager] about giving [advice • advise] to a hostile committee.
3. Carlos understands the [affect • effect] that the raise will have on his lifestyle.
4. Frances distributed the books [among • between] Amy, Betty, and Cindy.
5. George [assured • ensured] me that Harry will [ensure • insure] the property will be [ensured • insured].
6. Maury asked to study the data [farther • further] and wants to know [who's • whose] responsibility it is to write the report.
7. Natasha planted [fewer • less] seeds in the garden this year.
8. Rose's comment [a • an] hour ago about my good work habits [implies • infers] that I should get a raise.
9. Theresa thinks [its • it's • its'] necessary for us to sign in.
10. Warren must go for training to get [oriented • orientated] to his new position.
11. Xavier, as a [principal • principle] of our company, has strong [principals • principles] about paying off the loan's [principal • principle].
12. Yves wants [to • too • two] spend [to • too • two] much money for [to • too • two] cars.
13. Zoe [already • all ready] knows more [than • then] I since she can access [their • there • they're] data.

Solutions (correct answers appear in bold)

1. Andrew decided to [**accept** • except] [**your** • you're] proposal.
2. Barbara seemed [**anxious** • eager] about giving [**advice** • advise] to a hostile committee.
3. Carlos understands the [affect • **effect**] that the raise will have on his lifestyle.
4. Frances distributed the books [**among** • between] Amy, Betty, and Cindy.
5. George [**assured** • ensured] me that Harry will [**ensure** • insure] the property will be [ensured • **insured**].
6. Maury asked to study the data [farther • **further**] and wants to know [who's • **whose**] responsibility it is to write the report.
7. Natasha planted [**fewer** • less] seeds in the garden this year.
8. Rose's comment [a • **an**] hour ago about my good work habits [**implies** • infers] that I should get a raise.
9. Theresa thinks [its • **it's** • its'] necessary for us to sign in.
10. Warren must go for training to get [**oriented** • orientated] to his new position.
11. Xavier, as a [**principal** • principle] of our company, has strong [principals • **principles**] about paying off the loan's [**principal** • principle].
12. Yves wants [**to** • too • two] spend [to • **too** • two] much money for [to • too • **two**] cars.
13. Zoe [**already** • all ready] knows more [**than** • then] I since she can access [**their** • there • they're] data.

Commonly Confused Words—Rules

A. Article, use with consonant sounds (a laptop, a pen, a regulation)

An. Article, use with vowel sounds (an easement, an hour, an overview)

Accept. Verb: to receive (They accepted the award.)

Except. Preposition: excluding, apart from (The manual is finished except for the appendix.)

Advice. Noun: guidance (The technician gave advice about using the system.)

Advise. Verb: to guide, give guidance (The technician advised me to shut down the computer and restart when that problem occurs.)

Affect. Verb: to influence (Have the cutbacks affected your department?)

Effect. Noun: result (The effect was that no one did any work all day.)

Effect. Verb: to bring about (The new policy effected an immediate change.)

Already. Adverb: by this time (We have already met our quota.)

All ready. Adjective: prepared (The room is all ready for the meeting.)

Among. Preposition, use for more than two (The job was divided among Lee, Pat, and Pho.)

Between. Preposition, use for just two (The job was divided between Pat and Pho.)

Anxious. Adjective: uneasy, fearful (Rene was anxious about flying.)

Eager. Adjective: enthusiastic (Tashi was eager to start on the project.)

Assure. Verb: to give confidence to, reassure (The agent assured me the package would be delivered on time.)

Ensure. Verb: to make sure (The early start ensured we would arrive on time.)

Insure. Verb: to provide insurance (We insured the shipment for \$500.)

Farther. Adjective: more distant (Jorge lives farther from here than Jill.)

Further. Adjective: extending beyond (Can you take this concept further?)

Fewer. Adjective, use with plural nouns, countable items (Carla made fewer mistakes than did Billie.)

Less. Adjective, use with singular nouns or for degree, value, or amount (Carla is less upset than is Billie.)

Imply. Verb: to give a hint (My request for a raise should not imply that I am unhappy.)

Infer. Verb: to take a hint (I infer from my manager's praise that I deserve a raise.)

Irregardless. Misuse of irrespective or regardless

Irrespective. Preposition: without taking into account (We accept orders regardless of the invoice amount.)

Regardless. Same as irrespective

Its'. Misuse of its or it's

It's. Contraction of it is (It's three o'clock.)

Its. Possessive pronoun (Its color is red.)

Principal. Noun: chief (The principal of the company announced a public stock offering.)

Principal. Noun: a capital sum placed at interest (The principal of the loan is \$200,000.)

Principal. Adjective: most important (Our principal objective is to gain 10 percent market share by first quarter next year.)

Principle. Noun: a fundamental law or belief (Subject-verb agreement is a principle of English grammar.)

Than. Preposition: in comparison with (Sidney is more experienced than Barbara.)

Then. Noun: that time (Calvin knew me better then.)

Their. Possessive pronoun: third person plural, belonging to them (Their goals are ambitious.)

There. Noun: that place (Alex saw the CEO there.)

They're. Contraction of they are (They're about to make a decision.)

To. Preposition: movement toward (Kim went to the mail room.)

Too. Adverb: also; excessive (Lee, too, came in under budget.)

Two. Adjective: number (Lacey wrote two reports.)

Whose. Possessive pronoun (Whose book is this?)

Who's. Contraction of who is (Who's attending the lecture?)

Your. Possessive pronoun (Your speech motivated the audience.)

You're. Contraction of you are (You're likely to be promoted.)

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