Communication Strategies: Commonly Confused Words

**Allot, a lot, allot:** There is no such word as *a lot*. *A lot* means a great number or amount of something. *Allot* is similar to allocate. “There was not a lot of time to allot all the money to everyone.”

**Accept, Except:** *Except* means not including or other than something, while the word *accept* means to take that which is offered. “Except for food for the volunteers, Doris would not accept any donations.”

**Advice, Advise:** *Advice* is similar to words of wisdom or suggestions. To *advise* is the act of offering advice. “Grandpa tried to advise me when I was a youngster, but I wouldn't listen to his advice.”

**Affect, Effect:** To *affect*, as a verb, means to have an affect on something, while *affect* as a noun is a formal psychological term. “The patient, heavily sedated, spoke without affect.” The word, *effect*, means a change that is a result of an action. “The effect of the announcement of impending war will not affect his decision to join the military.”

**All ready, Already:** The adverb *already* means before or by now or the time in question. The two separate words *all* and *ready* indicate the readiness of a group. “I already told you we’re all ready to go out!”

**All right, Alright:** There is no such word as *alright*. “Is it all right if we eat in tonight?”

**All together, Altogether:** The first means all at once, the second means entirely. “You’re altogether wrong about the six friends going all together to the dance; each is going separately.”

**Alumni, Alumnae, Alumnus, Alumna:** One male graduate is an *alumnus*, one female graduate is an *alumna*, several female graduates are *alumnae*, and several males graduates or several male and female graduates are *alumni*.

**Among, Between:** The preposition *among* can describe location, (surrounded by), being a member of a group, or indicate division. The preposition *between* means at, into, or across the space separating two objects or regions. “The money was divided between Sarah and Bob; the land was divided among Billy, Henry, and Janice.”

**Anybody, Any body:** The pronoun *anybody* means anyone while the two separate words *any* and *body* indicate any number or specified physical body. “Anybody can help to search for any body that might not have been found in the wreckage.”

**Bad, Badly:** *Bad* is an adjective that describes poor quality while the adverb *badly* describes how unsatisfactorily or inadequate something is. “He felt bad that he had scored so badly on the test.”

**Besides, Beside:** They are both prepositions, but *besides* means in addition to while *beside* indicates place, (at the side of; next to). “Besides her groom, the bride wanted her dad beside her in the photo.”

**Cite, Sight, Site:** *Cite* means to quote as evidence, *sight* means the ability to see, and *site* means an area or construction site. *Site* is also short for *web site*. “The color on the Web site you cited in your paper was a sight to behold.”

continued on page 2
Emigrate, Immigrate: The verb *emigrate* means to leave one’s own country to settle elsewhere while the verb *immigrate* means to come to live permanently in a foreign country. “Ten people were trying to emigrate from the tyranny of their country and immigrate to the United States.”

Ensure, Insure: The verb *ensure* means to make certain that something shall occur or be the case while the verb *insure* means to arrange for compensation in the event of damage to or loss of (property). “To ensure that we continue to insure your house and car, send payment immediately.”

In, Into: *In* is an adverb while *into* is a preposition that indicates movement toward the inside of a place. “Go into the house, go in my purse, and bring me my money.”

Its, It’s: The contraction *it’s* means it is or it has. *Its* is a possessive pronoun meaning, more or less, of it or belonging to it. “It’s a shame that the dog lost its bone.”

Lay, lie: *Lie* doesn’t take a direct object, but *lay* does. You could lay a book down on the table. The past tense of *lie* is *lay* and the past tense of *lay* is *laid*. “As I lay in bed, I wondered where I had laid my watch.”

Passed, past: The adjective *past* locates something in time. As a noun, *past* indicates the thing of time that has gone by or the time before the present. *Past* as a preposition means beyond in time or after. *Past* as an adverb would mean so as to pass something. *Passed*, the verb, means to proceed or move forward. “In the past, twenty Easter parades have passed down this street.”

Real, Really: The adjective *real* modifies nouns or pronouns. The adverb *really* modifies verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. “When I realized I was really lost, the real importance of carrying a compass hit me.”

Roll, Role: *Roll* is a verb that means to move or turn over. It is also a baked good, a hair style, and part of the music of ‘rock and roll.’ The noun *role* is an actor’s part or some assumed character. “The role of a fireman is to teach people about fire safety by saying ‘stop, drop, and roll!’”

Than, Then: *Than* is a conjunction used in comparative statements. *Then* is an adverb that is used with a sequence of events or as a time marker. “For a while, Mary ran more quickly than I; then she dropped her pace.”

That, Which: The pronoun *that* identifies a specific person or object. The interrogative pronoun and adjective *which* asks for information or specifies one or more people or objects from a definite set. “The local dog kennels, which are on my way to work, are the ones that have been featured in the news lately.”

Try and, Try to: The phrase *try and* means a separation between things and indicates you will do two things separately. The phrase *try to* indicates that you will try to do something. There is a distinct connection between what you will try and what you will do. “The lady said she would try to get the dress in my size; I hoped she would try and keep looking.”

Who, That: The pronoun *who* indicates a person or group of people. *That* identifies a specific person or thing or refers to a specific thing previously mentioned. “The inspector, who gives orders that we must obey, said that the environmental law, which had never been enforced, would result in higher costs.”