

The Dirty Thirty

Words Even Smart People Misuse



**David Hatcher
and Lane Goddard**

Published in the United States of America by LandaBooks.

Copyright 2003 by David Hatcher and Lane Goddard. Copyright under International, Pan-American and Universal copyright Conventions. Published in the United States.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by an information storage and retrieval system — except for brief quotations (not to exceed 200 words) in a review or professional work — without permission in writing from the publisher.

ISBN 0-9729920-0-6

07 06 05 04 03 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



LandaBooks
7318 Gary Street
Springfield, Virginia 22150
(703) 644-6918
www.LandaBooks.com
info@LandaBooks.com

Contents

Introduction	5
How To Get the Most From this Book	7
The Dirty Thirty	8
Imply-infer	8
Its — It's	10
i.e. — e.g.	12
Appraise — Apprise	14
Capitol — Capital	16
Council — Counsel	18
Cumulative Exercise	20
Cumulative Exercise	21
Regime — Regimen	22
Adverse — Averse	24
Emigrate — Immigrate	26
Compliment — Complement	28
Adopt — Adapt	30
Forego — Forgo	32
Cumulative Exercise	34
Cumulative Exercise	35
Affect — Effect	36
Eminent — Imminent	38
Flaunt — Flout	40
Ingenious — Ingenuous	42
Ordinance — Ordnance	44
Simple — Simplistic	46
Cumulative Exercise	48
Cumulative Exercise	49
Stationary — Stationery	50
Principle — Principal	52
There — Their — They're	54
Two — To — Too	56
Your — You're	58

Criterion — Criteria	60
Cumulative Exercise	62
Cumulative Exercise	63
Compulsion — Compunction	64
Mitigate — Militate	66
Home in on — Hone in on	68
Cumulative Exercise	70
To Whom, or Not to Whom?	71
Advise — Advice	74
Could/Couldn't Care Less	76
Cumulative Exercise	78
Lagniappe	79
Bimonthly and Twelve p.m.	79
Just Between You and I	81

Introduction

We're Judged by Our Words

People judge us by our words — the ones we use, and the ones we *misuse*. Some words are misused much more often than others, and the words in this book are among the biggest troublemakers, even for good speakers and writers.

Why Are They So Hard?

One reason is that they often come in look-alike pairs, such as *affect-effect*, *who-whom*, and *regime-regimen*. And sometimes they're related in meaning, like *imply-infer*, and *emigrate-immigrate*. So it's easy to choose the wrong one of these near-identical twins. And because both are valid words, our spellcheckers won't give us much help in sorting them out. Fortunately, there are some simple tricks to help keep them straight.

Stalactites? Or Stalagmites?

One useful aid is mnemonics — memory hooks. As an example, let's take a pair of words that are easy to mix up: *stalactite* and *stalagmite*. They're not included in the dirty thirty, because they're not common in everyday speech. But otherwise they're good examples of troublesome terms. They look a lot alike, and they have similar meanings — both are found in caves, but one grows up from the ground, the other hangs down from the ceiling.

How to remember which is which? Simply notice that the first few letters are the same, until you get to *c* and *g*. Mentally pair these up with *ceiling* and *ground*, and you probably won't be able to forget — even if you try — that *stalactites* hang from the *ceiling*, and *stalagmites* grow up from the *ground*.

Not all of the word-pairs are that easy to keep separate, but we'll give you a clear explanation of the differences, along with practical exercises to confirm your understanding.

We'll also give you a few helpful comments from some of the best current references.

Not All Authorities Agree

But remember that authorities don't always agree. Sometimes you'll find one reference saying a usage is unacceptable (or nonstandard), while another insists that it's okay.

But knowing about that lack of unanimity can be helpful.

For example, *Webster's New World Dictionary* gives *infer* as one definition of *imply*, but adds that this is sometimes considered a "loose usage."

Knowing this doesn't stop you from deciding for yourself whether to use the words as synonyms. But it may help you choose a workable middle ground, such as our recommendation: keep them separate in your own speech and writing, but don't "correct" people who do otherwise.

This book is *not* intended to tell you how you should use words — nobody can or should dictate that to you. It *is* intended to tell you what some respected authorities on our language have to say about the words — about which uses are standard, which are not.

Their advice will help as you work through the exercises in this book, and the exercises will help you choose and use words with more precision and greater confidence.

One last bit of advice — let yourself have fun while you're learning.

How To Get the Most From this Book

All the words we'll cover are commonly used — and commonly misused. Chances are that you already know the difference between some of these words — maybe most of them. But working through the book to learn any you don't know, and to refresh your memory on those you do, is worth doing.

Here are some suggestions for getting the most from this book.

1. **Work from front to back** — at least most of the time. It's okay to skip ahead to read about a pair of words you're especially interested in. But aside from that, we suggest you work through the lessons in the order they're presented here, rather than skipping around too much. One reason is that some of the exercises are cumulative — they include not only words from that lesson, but words that have been covered in the lessons before it. And occasionally, we'll even drop in a word pair that we haven't covered yet, just for fun.
2. **Use the words.** As you work through the book — and afterward — use the words as often as you can in your own speech and writing. This will confirm that you understand them, will give you good practice in using them appropriately, and will help fix them in your memory so you don't falter when you need to use them later.
3. **Practice your word-watching.** Keep an eye out for misuses in the speech and writing of others. You'll find lots in menus, newsletters, bulletins from informal organizations. And you'll also find them in the work of professional writers and editors, because they too get tangled up in these words now and then. (This doesn't mean that they're incompetents; it just means that we all need to be extra careful with these words, because if they trip up the professionals, they can trip us up as well.)
4. **Have fun with these words.** If you know someone who would enjoy working with you as you learn, you can work together, maybe challenging each other with sentences you make up. And don't embarrass anyone who confuses any of these words — that's no fun.

The Dirty Thirty

Imply-infer

We like for people to be open and straightforward in their communications with us — most of the time. But sometimes a little gentle cushioning of the truth works better.

Suppose someone you care about (a spouse, supervisor, or child) is preparing a speech, and is feeling insecure about it, maybe downright scared. You volunteer to listen to a practice run, and you see lots of things wrong with the speech. But if you blurt out a list of deficiencies, you could hurt the other person's feelings (and your relationship).

So instead of being brutally honest, you sort of bubble-wrap the truth, offering gentle hints and tactful suggestions. When you do this, you are depending on the other person to understand what you're getting at, to read between the lines.

Sure, this kind of roundabout communication takes longer, but sometimes it's essential, especially if you want to keep from damaging egos or relationships.

Both *imply* and *infer* involve this kind of communications, where the meaning is not expressed directly, but hinted at. The difference is that one of the words refers to the *expression* of ideas (speaking or writing), and the other word refers to *receiving and understanding* what's meant (listening or reading, then taking the intended hint).

So in summary, to *imply* something is to express it without saying it explicitly — to hint at it, to talk around it. You can imply with words, or by other means (a yawn may imply boredom, or sleepiness).

And to *infer* is to understand what was hinted at, to read between the lines, to "get it." Notice that inferring is a mental process, so words or gestures can not infer anything.

Mnemonic (memory aid): The middle letter of each word is a good clue. The P helps you remember that imPly is to Put meaning out there, and the F reminds us that to inFer is to get the meaning From the clues. (We often find the word *from* following close behind *infer*.)

Caution: Some good dictionaries list *imply* as one definition of *infer*, but this is often considered a loose usage.

Our advice is to keep the words separate in your own writing and speaking, but not to make a habit of correcting those who don't.

The exercise below will help make sure you can use the words in their standard senses.

Exercise: Imply — Infer

1. Do your words imply/infer that you agree?
2. May I imply/infer from your words that you agree?
3. No, I did not intend to imply/infer that; please don't draw that implication/inference.
4. The senator wouldn't give a direct answer, but he implied/inferred that he would vote for it.
5. The implication/inference I drew from her expression was that she might go along.
6. When you said that, what were you implying/infering?
7. When you heard her say that, what did you imply/infer?
8. Your turn: Write a sentence to test knowledge of these words. _____

1. imply; 2. infer; 3. imply, inference; 4. implied; 5. inference; 6. implying; 7. infer

Its — It's

The slick and flashy new poster in the bookstore window caught my eye. It said that a new, unabridged dictionary had been issued by a major publishing company, and would soon be on sale there.

The dictionary, the poster said, was “The best in it’s class.”

Sure, it should have been *its* — without the apostrophe. Makes you wonder how such an error could sneak under the radar of all the writers, editors, and proofers who should have caught it. And this is not an isolated case—I see these two little words interchanged often, even in well edited publications.

One reason we make this mistake is that we get used to using apostrophe-s to show possession — John’s car, the boy’s bike, the boat’s engine. So when we want to say something like “The dog lost its collar,” we may drop in an apostrophe, without thinking. But possessive pronouns (e.g., *hers, his, ours, theirs*) are the exception to the rule — they don’t take an apostrophe.

The lesson here is that it’s not enough to know the difference between these tricky word-pairs, but that we have to be constantly on guard to make sure we use the words the way we intend to.

The difference:

It’s means “it is,” or sometimes “it has,” as in *it’s easy to confuse these terms*, or *it’s been a tough year*.

Its refers to something that belongs to (or is closely associated with) “it.” Examples: *The dog wagged its tail*, and *The stock lost a good deal of its value*.

Mnemonic: Think of the apostrophe as an “i” printed a little above the line, so you’ll look at *it’s* and think “it is.” Use that memory hook as you work the exercise on the next page.

Exercise: Its — It's

1. Its/it's almost noon, time to give the cat its/it's food.
2. The car has its/it's problems, but its/it's been a reliable vehicle.
3. Its/it's most worrisome fault is that its/it's hard to start on cold mornings.
4. Its/it's a mystery to me why its/it's so stubborn, but its/it's certainly true.
5. Its/it's battery has been changed, and its/it's plugs have been cleaned, but its/it's problem persists.
6. This sentence has its/it's benefits, but I'm glad its/it's the penultimate one in this exercise.
7. Now its/it's time for me to write an example of my own.
8. Your turn:

1. its, its; 2. its, its; 3. its, its; 4. its, its; 5. its, its; 6. its, its; 7. its,

i.e. — e.g.

These little abbreviations can be useful short-cuts in writing. But if you do use them, make sure you choose the one that says what you intend.

The difference:

The abbreviation i.e. (Latin for *id est*) means “that is.” Use it when you want to explain, specify, or clarify (not when you want to give an example). So you’d write “My last test-grade (i.e., an A), made me feel good.”

The abbreviation e.g. (also Latin, for *exempli gratia*) means “for example.” You would use it in a sentence like “Bring any kind of dessert (e.g., cake or cookies).”

How to remember:

By taking a little liberty with the language, we can translate the i.e. as “it equals,” and the e.g. as “example given.”

So you’d say “Bring any kind of dessert (e.g., cookies),” because you’re giving an *example* of a dessert the person might bring.

And you’d say “I hope you’ll bring my favorite dessert (i.e., chocolate mousse),” because chocolate mousse *equals* your favorite dessert.

Note: The most-common way to write these abbreviations is within parentheses, with a period after each, and a comma after the second period, like this: Maybe I’ll order some kind of cool drink (e.g., lemonade).

Now you can test your knowledge on the appropriate exercise (i.e., the one on the next page).

Exercise: i.e. — e.g.

1. Its/it's time for my favorite TV program (i.e./e.g., "Watch Your Words").
2. Its/it's on our only public channel (i.e./e.g., Channel 32).
3. I inferred/IMPLIED from its/it's barking that my favorite dog (i.e./e.g., Rex) was chasing something.
4. His frown IMPLIED/inferred that he didn't like my request (i.e./e.g., that I be given a week's leave with pay).
5. Its/it's true that they sell many different kinds of apples (i.e./e.g., Staymans, Granny Smiths).
6. Let's invite one of the five team members (i.e./e.g., Tom or Mark).
7. She always takes a good book (i.e./e.g., *Moby Dick*, *War and Peace*) on vacation.
8. He was reading from his favorite poetry book (i.e./e.g., *Talton's Verses*).
9. Your turn:

1. it's, i.e.; 2. it's, i.e.; 3. inferred, its, i.e.; 4. IMPLIED, i.e.; 5. it's, e.g.; 6. e.g.; 7. e.g.; 8. i.e.

Appraise — Apprise

The difference:

To *appraise* something is to *judge* it, to assess or estimate its value. If you apply for a mortgage loan on your house, an *appraiser* may come to look it over. During a performance *appraisal*, the supervisor evaluates the work the employee has done.

To *apprise* is to *inform*. A newscaster may promise to keep us *apprised* of any further news, or an interested person may ask to be *apprised* of any new developments.

Example of a common misuse: “Please keep me apprised.” (It should be “keep me *apprised*.”)

Mnemonic: Use the *i-ai* spelling difference to remember that the one with just the *i* means *inform*.

Also, you can think “When they *appraise* my performance, I’d like to get *praise*, or maybe even a *raise*.”

Note: *Webster’s New World Dictionary* agrees that they should be kept separate, and does not give either as a synonym for the other.

So keep them separate as you work the exercise on the following page.

Exercise: Appraise — Apprise

1. Please appraise/appraise the situation, and keep me appraised/apprised.
2. The car dealer will appraise/appraise my oldest car (i.e./e.g., the '67 Volvo) and appraise/appraise me of its/it's trade-in value.
3. Please appraise/appraise the applicant's qualifications, and appraise/appraise me of your rating.
4. The assessor will make an appraisal/appraisal of the value of the house, then will appraise/appraise the mortgage company.
5. The senior personnel specialist (i.e./e.g., Lee Simkins) appraised/apprised us of the results.
6. Your turn:

1. appraise, appraised; 2. appraise, i.e., apprise, its; 3. appraise, apprise; 4. appraisal, appraise; 5. i.e., appraised

Capitol — Capital

These two words are pronounced the same, so what we have here is basically a spelling problem — one that your software won't help you with. But there's a simple way to keep them straight.

The difference:

The word *capitol* has only one common meaning — the building where the state or federal legislature meets.

Capital has several meanings. These include money or wealth (she raised capital to start her business), the city that is the seat of government, something excellent (a capital idea), an upper-case letter (a capital B), the most important (the capital reason for doing that), and punishable by death (a capital crime, capital punishment).

Example of common misuses: Washington is the nation's capitol. (It should be *capital*.)

Mnemonic: To remember the difference, make it easy on yourself by focusing on the simpler one, *capitol*. Most capitol buildings have a dome, so match the O's in dOme and capitOl. The other definitions, listed above, use *capital*.

So it's a capital idea to remember that the capitol building has a dome.

Note 1: *Capitol* is usually capitalized when referring to the building in D.C. where the U.S. legislature meets, but usually written with a small c in referring to a building where a state legislature meets.

Note 2: Some things that are near, or closely associated with, a capitol building may be spelled the same way: Capitol Hill in Washington, and businesses near the building (e.g., Capitol Cleaners, Capitol Café).

Exercise: Capitol — Capital

1. Let's drive into Virginia's capital/capitol city (i.e./e.g., Richmond) and visit the capital/capitol building.
2. I think its/it's a capital/capitol idea, if we can raise the needed capital/capitol (i.e./e.g., the money for food and gas).
3. Some businesses on Capital/Capitol Hill in D.C. use their location in their names (i.e./e.g., Congressional Cleaners).
4. She is strongly against capital/capitol punishment (i.e./e.g., executing criminals).
5. She is glad that its/it's not practiced here in the nation's capital/capitol.
6. Your turn:

1. capital, i.e., capitol; 2. its, capital, i.e.; 3. Capitol, e.g.; 4. capital, i.e.; 5. it's, capital