What You Need to Know about a Word to Use it Correctly in Your Writing:
Word Choice and Use

Type	Examples	Notes
Denotation	a. The researchers **counted** the number of responses given my each participant. b. How much do student evaluations **count** in the reviews of instructors?	It is important to understand the different meanings a single word might have. In this case, in the first example, count means to calculate the total number of something, whereas in the second sentence, it means to have value or importance.
Shades of Meaning	a. Given his high approval ratings, the public seems to be more **forgiving** of the president's difficulties than the press and Congress are. b. Silver is the most **forgiving** car color, as it shows the least amount of dirt, dents and scratches.	Many words can be used in different contexts to create different shades of meaning. In this case, the first example is in a more literal context: people forgive or not. In the second, a car color cannot really forgive, but figuratively, it can allow for mistakes or weaknesses.
Connotation	a. After the plane crash, the investigators **interviewed** the pilots. b. After the plane crash, the investigators **interrogated** the pilots.	A word's connotation refers to how strong of a feeling the word creates. It is possible that either verb accurately describes the situation with the pilots. The second sentence is much stronger in feeling, suggesting that the interviewer might feel that the pilots had done something wrong.
Register	a. Researchers compiled **tons** of evidence to support their position. b. Researchers compiled **abundant** evidence to support their position.	Register refers to the style of language, grammar and words used for particular situations. In the first sentence, we see a shift in register: the situation (academic writing and the rest of the vocabulary in the sentence) requires a more formal word choice than the word 'tons.'
Frequency	a. Scholars dismiss this theory as **risible**. b. Scholars dismiss this theory as **ridiculous**.	Risible is used very infrequently in English. There is not necessarily anything wrong with using a less-frequent word, like risible, in the correct context. However, one danger of choosing a word out of a thesaurus is not knowing how frequently the word is used and perhaps overusing it.

Type	Examples	Notes
Collocation	Researchers are quite **interested of** the relationship between socio-economic status and acquisition of academic English. Researchers are quite **interested in** the relationship between socio-economic status and acquisition of academic English.	Collocation refers to words that co-locate, a combination of words that are commonly used together. There are not necessarily rules for which words can or cannot go together, so you'll need to investigate words to learn more. In this case – 'interested' is followed by 'in' – not 'of.' If your team wins a close match, you might call it a 'narrow victory' but you would not call the opposite a 'wide victory.' You could write that your team won 'by a wide margin.'
Spelling/ Homophones	In her article, Santos **sites** several studies that examine this relationship. In her article, Santos **cites** several studies that examine this relationship.	Many words are often confused because, while they are spelled differently, they sound the same. The ones that often appear in grammar handbooks are 'they're' and 'their,' which play very different roles grammatically. In the example in this table, the writer confused 'sites' (a noun referring to a location) and 'cites' (the verb form of citation).
Word Forms or **Derivatives**	The President claims that our current system does not allow immigrants to **pursuit** the American Dream. (pursue) The **persistment** of these economic problems will negatively influence consumers. (persistence)	In the first example, the writer confused 'pursuit' (the noun form) and 'pursue' (the verb form). The second example involves a made-up form that is 'possible' but does not exist. 'ment' is a *possible* noun ending, but 'persistence' is the correct noun form; 'persist' is the verb form.
Grammatical Environment	Many people claim that bilingual education **causes that learners develop** English skills more slowly than English only programs, whereas others believe the opposite. **causes learners to develop** English skills more slowly than English only programs,	Certain words require certain grammatical environments. In this case, the verb cause can be followed by a noun (cause + a problem) or an object and infinitive (cause learners to develop) *not* a that-clause (*causes that learners develop). Placing a less-familiar word in the wrong grammatical environment often leads to the "awk" comment in the margin.