

Overused and Discouraged Words and Phrases

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This version of the document is dated 2025-12-08.

To improve English usage, reduce monotony, and enrich English vocabulary in writing and speech, I have compiled these two lists on what not to say and what to say better. Many items in these tables were inspired by Emilio Bernal Labrada, “Good usage prevents abusage”, 2018.

The lists could also be useful as a handout to Literacy students from ninth grade and up, or to suggest alternatives to overused and discouraged words for younger students. For my other suggestions on Literacy instruction, see “**Suggestions for Instructional Materials**¹”.

This is an open-source document; see its **source code**². You can send comments on this document on the **GitHub issues page**³.

1 Overused Words

Instead of just saying...	Try saying...	Notes
Also, ...	in addition, furthermore, moreover, further, plus, besides, to add to that, on top of that, not only that, what is more, apart from that, additionally	
almost all another [number] (for example, <i>another five</i>)	most all, nearly all, all but a few an additional [number], [number] additional, a further [number], [number] more, [number] extra, an extra [number]	Inspired by E. Bernal. Inspired by E. Bernal.
award winner bad actor	awardee, recipient (of an award) malicious actor, malevolent actor, wrongdoer, evildoer, baddie, malfeasant, illegitimate actor	
bias (<i>in the sense of ‘subjective opinion’</i>) cause	prejudice, subjectivity, partiality lead to, provoke, yield, engender, occasion, beget, breed, bring on, bring about, give rise to, produce, result in	Similarly: <i>biased</i> → <i>prejudiced</i> . Verb.
check out	discover, uncover, learn more about, find out about, see for yourself, consult	In the sense of ‘discover’, rather than ‘register a book to borrow’ or ‘end a hotel stay’.

¹<https://peteroupc.github.io/insmat.html>

²<https://github.com/peteroupc/peteroupc.github.io/raw/master/usage.md>

³<https://github.com/peteroupc/peteroupc.github.io/issues>

Instead of just saying...	Try saying...	Notes
focus on	touch on, concentrate on, center on, emphasize, put/lay emphasis on, zoom in on, put/lay weight on, put/lay an accent on, deal mostly with, prioritize, concern, relate to, be anchored on, be devoted to, devote [itself] to, insist on, zero in on, zoom in on about, dedicated to, devoted to, dealing with, treating of, relating to, involving, concentrated on, concerning, anchored on, directed to, oriented on, aimed at nice, fine, swell, decent, lovely, admirable, pleasing, pleasant	
focused on (for example, <i>a book (that is) focused on a topic</i>)	very good, fantastic, terrific, remarkable, magnificent, excellent, splendid, wonderful, superb	
good	occur, take place, unfold, come about, manifest, produce itself, present itself, come to pass.	Words of positive sentiment.
great	[something] among them, among them [something], above all [something], [something] included, especially [something], even [something], inclusive of [something]. depart, get out of, exit, step away (from), abandon, go away (from), get away (from), run away (from), walk away.	Words of very positive sentiment.
happen	<i>an event</i> kills [someone]; <i>an event</i> puts [someone] to death	Inspired by E. Bernal.
including [something]	<i>an event</i> kills many; <i>an event</i> [synonym for causes] the death of many; <i>an event</i> puts many to death	Inspired by E. Bernal.
leave	<i>an event</i> injures [someone]	In the sense of 'go away'.
<i>an event</i> leaves [someone] dead	<i>an event</i> injures many; <i>an event</i> hurts many; <i>an event</i> [synonym for causes] many injuries	Inspired by E. Bernal.
<i>an event</i> leaves many (people) dead	housie, housette, houselet, minihouse	Inspired by E. Bernal.
<i>an event</i> leaves [someone] injured	Observe that..., Notably..., Notice that..., Take note that..., It should be noted that..., It is worth noting that, It bears mentioning that..., Keep in mind that..., We point out that..., [leave out]	Inspired by E. Bernal.
<i>an event</i> leaves many (people) injured	keep users safe online, keep Internet users safe, keep internauts safe, protect users online	Inspired by E. Bernal.
little house		
Note that...		Diminutive.
keep people safe online		
jury member	juror	Suggested by E. Bernal.
many people	many	
member (<i>of an association, club, etc.</i>)	adherent, individual.	Inspired by E. Bernal. E. Bernal wrote of his concerns about this word's overuse.

Instead of just saying...	Try saying...	Notes
people, persons	men and women, individuals, audience, public, population, anyone..., whoever..., they who..., [leave out]. <i>Informal:</i> folks.	More generally, a more specific term than <i>people</i> or <i>persons</i> is preferred. Inspired by E. Bernal.
people living in [territory]	residents of [territory], inhabitants of [territory]	Also consider, for example: <i>people living in Italy</i> → <i>Italians</i> .
(the) professors	the faculty, professorship, professor corps, professor body, body of professors	
say	declare, affirm, assert, express, state, make (it) known, mention, comment, remark. <i>Depending on context:</i> note, affirm, add, explain, elaborate, conclude; share, reveal, disclose; opine, give the opinion, argue, contend, maintain; reply, respond, answer; signal, indicate, point out; acknowledge, admit; highlight, emphasize, underline, underscore, stress.	Spanish and French press articles tend to employ numerous synonyms for this word.
sit down with	interview, join ... for an interview, meet, consult with, exchange views with, speak with, talk with, converse with, chat with	Suggested by E. Bernal.
[someone] says (that)...	According to [someone], ...In the words of [someone], ...In [someone]'s words, ...Per [someone], ...As [someone] [synonym for <i>says</i>], ...[someone] [synonym for <i>says</i>] that...	
[someone] says (that)...	In [someone]'s opinion, ...In the opinion of [someone], ...In [someone]'s view, ...In [someone]'s eyes, ...In [someone]'s estimation, ...For [someone], ...As [someone] believes, ...As [someone] sees it, ...In [someone]'s belief, ...[someone] believes that...[someone] opines that...[someone] considers that...As [someone] puts it, ...	Expressing an opinion.
[someone] says (that) [something] is...	[someone] considers [something] (as)...[someone] labels [something] (as)...[someone] finds [something]...[someone] calls [something]...[someone] pronounces [something]...[someone] declares [something] (as)...[someone] qualifies [something] as...[something] is ... to [someone] for [someone], [something] is...	
[someone] was identified as [name].	[someone] went by the name of [name]. [someone] was named [name]. [someone], [name], ...	Inspired by E. Bernal.
[someone], identified as [name], ...	[someone], going by the name of [name], ...[someone], named [name], ...[someone], [name], ...	Inspired by E. Bernal.
[something] is used to [do something else]	[something] serves to [do something else].	

Instead of just saying...	Try saying...	Notes
The fact that...	That...	Suggested by Tom Hitchner, UCLA, in an Advanced Placement Daily video.
The fact that <i>he appeared</i>	That <i>he appeared</i> , <i>His appearance</i> , <i>His appearing</i> .	Suggested by Tom Hitchner, UCLA, in an Advanced Placement Daily video.
(the) teachers use	teachership, teacher corps, teacher body, body of teachers employ, make use of.	Verb. Also: “ <i>something</i> is used to...” → <i>something</i> is for..., <i>something</i> serves to...; “you can use <i>something</i> to...” → with <i>something</i> you can..., <i>something</i> lets you...; <i>something</i> helps you....
what's happening	what's going on, what's occurring, what's [synonym for <i>happening</i>].	Inspired by E. Bernal.

Another technique to try is to rewrite a text to avoid overused words as much as possible.

2 Discouraged Words

Emilio Bernal, in “Good usage prevents abusage”, wrote of his concerns about, among other things, the overuse of *people*, *persons*, *members*, *day*, and *happen*, as well as the unnecessary repetition of words (for example, *He is someone who is reliable*; *She wants what she wants*; *It'll happen when it'll happen*). His work formed the basis of many of the suggestions in the following table.

Don't say...	Say...	Notes
after [something] happened, ... alleged victim all day today basically before [something] happened, ... because of the fact that	after [something] likely victim all day [if <i>today</i> is understood], from dawn to dusk (<i>today</i>), from sunrise to sunset (<i>today</i>) [leave out] before [something] because	Inspired by E. Bernal. Inspired by E. Bernal. Inspired by E. Bernal. Inspired by E. Bernal. Inspired by E. Bernal. Suggested by Tom Hitchner, UCLA, in an Advanced Placement Daily video.
blizzard conditions	blizzard	Inspired by E. Bernal.

Don't say...	Say...	Notes
[adjective] day today (for example, <i>nice day today</i>) dead people due to the fact that	[adjective] day [if <i>today</i> is understood], it's [adjective] today the dead because	Inspired by E. Bernal.
examples include but are not limited to	examples are	Inspired by E. Bernal. Suggested by Tom Hitchner, UCLA, in an Advanced Placement Daily video.
family members	relatives, kin	The word "examples" already says that the list is not all-inclusive. 'Relatives' suggested by E. Bernal.
including but not limited to individual people injured people is someone who is is someone who is [adjective] (for example, <i>is someone who is reliable</i>) is something that is it is midnight tonight least favorite literally (<i>in the sense of 'absolutely'</i>)	including individuals the injured is is [adjective]; is a(n) [adjective] one is it is midnight least desired, least preferred absolutely, totally, utterly, altogether, downright, completely, certainly; [leave out]*** moment favorite falsehood, untruth [adjective] night [if <i>tonight</i> is understood], it's [adjective] tonight [number]	Inspired by E. Bernal. Inspired by E. Bernal. Inspired by E. Bernal. Inspired by E. Bernal.
moment in time most favorite myth (<i>when a story is not meant</i>) [adjective] night tonight (for example, <i>nice night tonight</i>) [number] people/persons	 is it is midnight least desired, least preferred absolutely, totally, utterly, altogether, downright, completely, certainly; [leave out]*** moment favorite falsehood, untruth [adjective] night [if <i>tonight</i> is understood], it's [adjective] tonight [number]	Inspired by E. Bernal. Inspired by E. Bernal. Inspired by E. Bernal.
one way or another one way or the other other people people's identities people's lives people/persons being held/jailed people/persons know people/persons complaining people/persons present/attending people/persons think point in time	either way; [leave out] either way; [leave out] others every personal identity, who someone is life (the) detainees, the jailed. <i>In criminal cases:</i> (the) inmates, the prisoners. it is known, it is generally known, it is commonly known, we know (the) complainants (the) attendees, the audience, the attending public it is thought, it is commonly thought, it is believed, the general belief is, we think, they believe, by popular belief time, instant, moment	Inspired by E. Bernal. Leave out <i>people</i> or <i>persons</i> if understood. Inspired by E. Bernal. Inspired by E. Bernal.

Don't say...	Say...	Notes
pregnant people prevent [something] from happening rain conditions, rainy conditions remove (<i>in the sense of 'erase' or 'abolish'</i>)	the pregnant, pregnant women prevent [something] rain. <i>Or as appropriate:</i> drizzle, showers, squalls, light rain, heavy rain, downpours. eliminate, erase, delete, suppress, withhold, take away, get [something] off, get rid of, abolish, repeal, rescind, do away with	Inspired by E. Bernal. Inspired by E. Bernal. It is correct to say “remove [something] from [something else]”, speak of “removing” an obstacle or disadvantage, or use in the sense of ‘move [something] away’.
(they) saved their lives (their) lives, deaths, lifetimes, healths, sakes, identities, futures This is [program].	(they) were saved, (they) saved their life their life, death, lifetime, health, sake, identity, future <i>To identify the program:</i> [program]; You are listening to [program]; You are tuned to [program]. <i>To present the program:</i> [program] starts now; We (now) welcome you to [program]; We (now) bring you [program]; Now starting [program]; Presenting [program]; We now present [program]; We now start [program]; It's time for [program].	Inspired by E. Bernal. Inspired by E. Bernal. Identifications of TV and radio programs. Suggested by E. Bernal.
[time] before now until such time as [verb] whether or not (for example, <i>know whether or not,</i> <i>determine whether or not</i>)	[time] ago until [verb] whether**	Inspired by E. Bernal. Suggested by E. Bernal.

Even here, it is worth trying to rewrite a text to avoid discouraged words to the greatest extent possible.

** Use “whether or not B” or “whether B or not” only to mean ‘both if B and if not’.

*** In formal writing, use *literally* only to mean ‘in the exact sense; not figuratively’.

3 To Improve English Usage Through Word Processing Apps...

What I would like to see is an open-source plugin for popular word-processing applications that finds overused and discouraged words and phrases in a document, such as those mentioned earlier, and suggests corresponding replacements. (A similar practice is found in Web browsers’ spell checkers and as a built-in feature in some closed source word-processing apps.) For example, the plugin could look for instances of “sit down with”, underline them, and show suggestions such as “interview”, “consult with”, and so on in a menu when the phrase is selected for a language check.

4 Derivations

Derivations of existing words, so underused a procedure in our language, can enrich the vocabulary of English.

An interesting exercise to try with students is to build—

- the feminine form of some words through suffixes. For example, -an becomes -anesse, -ian becomes -ienne, -ican becomes -ickenne or -icanesse: *Bostonian* becomes *Bostonienne*, *American* becomes *Americenne* or *Americanesse*, *Puerto Rican* becomes *Puerto Ricanesse* etc., instead of resorting to adding *female* or *woman*.
- the diminutive form of some words through suffixes (for example: -ie, -ette, -kin, -let) or through prefixes (for example: mini-, micro-), without resorting to adding *little* or *small*.

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