



Words Commonly Confused

Source: John E. McIntyre is an assistant managing editor at the Baltimore Sun

Cement/concrete- The powder in a bag is cement. Concrete is the substance made from cement, water, sand and gravel. If you're not writing about a powder, don't use cement.

Exhaustive/exhausting Exhaustive means thorough and complete -- in the sense that a topic is exhausted, used up. Exhausting means profoundly tiring.

Flack/flak-- Flack is a pejorative word for someone engaged in public relations; flak, or anti-aircraft fire, is what a flack catches from the press.

Flair/flare-- See *Scrooge with a Christian flare in this new musical*. A flare is a bright light. Flair, which originally referred to a dog's ability to discriminate among smells, has come to mean a talent, aptitude or knack.

Forward/foreword- Forward is a direction; a foreword is an introduction to a book, the words that come before the main text.

Hark/hearken-- To hark is to listen; to hearken is to heed. To recall an earlier time is to hark back, not hearken back.

Lead/led-- Lead (pronounced 'led') is a metal. Lead (pronounced 'leed') is the verb meaning to direct or guide. Led (also pronounced "led") is the past tense of the verb. It is presumably the confusion of sounds that leads some writers to use lead as the past tense of the verb; do not be led astray.

Loath/loathe – Loath is reluctant (and mildly archaic); loathe means to despise.

Mantel/mantle -- A mantel is a shelf above a fireplace. A mantle is a cloak, often used metaphorically to indicate the authority or responsibility of an office -- the mantle of power.

Peak/pique-- A peak is a mountaintop (noun) or the arrival at a high point (verb). Pique is resentment (as a noun) or arousal or provocation (as a verb). Interest rates can peak, but one's interest is piqued.

Restful/restive- Restive means unruly or balky, jumpy or nervous. Restful means soothing.

Role/roll-- Membership roles at fat farms, health spas and racket clubs would swell. A role is the part of a character in a play; a roll is a list or register (Whether it is prudent to use the verb "swell" in the context of "fat farms" is a separate question.)

Trooper/trouper- A trooper is a soldier, a trouper is an experienced actor. When we speak of someone who comes through difficult circumstances dependably, we call that person a trouper.

Nouns used as verbs

Nouns are nouns, and verbs are verbs. Sometimes in English one transmutes into the other, but the following nouns do not become verbs in the pages of The Baltimore Sun.

Author

Critique

Debut

Host-- Likewise **guest**.

Impact

Journalese

Some words infest copy because journalists have traditionally been fond of cablese, words originally coined to save transmission costs and later thought to impart a snappy tone. The charm of "upcoming" "ongoing" and similar words has long since faded. Others that we use reflexively are simply not needed.

Some specimens:

Currently-- If some action is continuing, that circumstance will almost always be clear in context, so currently can usually be dispensed with. If you use it in place of now, that is pretentious.

Downplay-- Play down is preferable.

Here -- If your story has a dateline, the reader can figure out where the action is taking place. Ration yourself to no more than one here to a story if you feel a need to establish your physical presence on the scene. To use it repeatedly does not convey immediacy. Rather, it begins to suggest a giddy breathlessness on the part of the reporter: "it's really me, and I'm actually here

in Ouagadougou."

Ongoing-- This word is almost always superfluous; continuing action is usually clear in context. If you must use something, use continuing.

Upcoming-- Also almost always superfluous. Coming or forthcoming does perfectly well something is needed.

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