

By Jody Gilbert

These days, we tend to communicate via the keyboard as much as we do verbally. Often, we're in a hurry, quickly dashing off e-mails with typos, grammatical shortcuts (I'm being kind here), and that breezy, e.e. cummings, no-caps look. It's expected. It's no big deal. But other times, we try to invest a little care, avoiding mistakes so that there's no confusion about what we're saying and so that we look professional and reasonably bright.

In general, we can slip up in a verbal conversation and get away with it. A colleague may be thinking, *Did she just say "irregardless"?*, but the words flow on, and our worst transgressions are carried away and with luck, forgotten.

That's not the case with written communications. When we commit a grammatical crime in e-mails, discussion posts, reports, memos, and other professional documents, there's no going back. We've just officially gone on record as being careless or clueless. And here's the worst thing. It's not necessary to be an editor or a language whiz or a spelling bee triathlete to spot such mistakes. They have a way of doing a little wiggle dance on the screen and then reaching out to grab the reader by the throat.

So here we are in the era of Word's red-underline "wrong spelling, dumb ass" feature and Outlook's Always Check Spelling Before Sending option, and still the mistakes proliferate. Catching typos is easy (although not everyone does it). It's the other stuff—correctly spelled but incorrectly wielded—that sneaks through and makes us look stupid. Here's a quick review of some of the big ones.

1 Loose for lose

No: I always **loose** the product key.

Yes: I always **lose** the product key.

2 It's for its (or god forbid, its')

No: Download the HTA, along with **it's** readme file.

Yes: Download the HTA, along with **its** readme file.

No: The laptop is overheating and **its** making that funny noise again.

Yes: The laptop is overheating and **it's** making that funny noise again.

3 They're for their for there

No: The managers are in **they're** weekly planning meeting.

Yes: The managers are in **their** weekly planning meeting.

No: The techs have to check **there** cell phones at the door, and **their** not happy about it.

Yes: The techs have to check **their** cell phones at the door, and **they're** not happy about it.

4 i.e. for e.g.

No: Use an anti-spyware program (**i.e.**, Ad-Aware).

Yes: Use an anti-spyware program (**e.g.**, Ad-Aware).

Note: The term *i.e.* means "that is"; *e.g.* means "for example." And a comma follows both of them.

5 Effect for affect

No: The outage shouldn't **effect** any users during work hours.

Yes: The outage shouldn't **affect** any users during work hours.

Yes: The outage shouldn't have any **effect** on users.

Yes: We will **effect** several changes during the downtime.

Note: *Impact* is not a verb. Purists, at least, beg you to use *affect* instead:

No: The outage shouldn't **impact** any users during work hours.

Yes: The outage shouldn't **affect** any users during work hours.

Yes: The outage should have no **impact** on users during work hours.

6 You're for your

No: Remember to defrag **you're** machine on a regular basis.

Yes: Remember to defrag **your** machine on a regular basis.

No: **Your** right about the changes.

Yes: **You're** right about the changes.

7 Different than for different from

No: This setup is **different than** the one at the main office.

Yes: This setup is **different from** the one at the main office.

Yes: This setup is **better than** the one at the main office.

8 Lay for lie

No: I got dizzy and had to **lay** down.

Yes: I got dizzy and had to **lie** down.

Yes: Just **lay** those books over there.

9 Then for than

No: The accounting department had more problems **then** we did.

Yes: The accounting department had more problems **than** we did.

Note: Here's a sub-peeve. When a sentence construction begins with *If*, you don't need a *then*. *Then* is implicit, so it's superfluous and wordy:

No: If you can't get Windows to boot, **then you'll** need to call Ted.

Yes: If you can't get Windows to boot, **you'll** need to call Ted.

10

Could of, would of *for* could have, would have

No: I **could of** installed that app by mistake.

Yes: I **could have** installed that app by mistake.

No: I **would of** sent you a meeting notice, but you were out of town.

Yes: I **would have** sent you a meeting notice, but you were out of town.

Bonus peeve

I'll just throw one more thing out here: My current burning pet peeve. At some point, who knows when, it became common practice to say that something is "hit and miss." Nuh-UH. It can't be both, right? It either hits or it misses... "Hit OR miss." Granted, it's a small thing, a Boolean-obsessive sort of thing. But it's nonetheless vexing because it's so illogical. Okay, that's mine. If you've got a peeve of your own, [share it in the discussion](#) (or post a comment and tell me to get over it).

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