Commonly Confused Words

Affect/Effect

Affect is an **A**ction

Effect is an **E**nd result

The majority of the time you use *affect* with an *a* as a <u>verb</u> and *effect* with an *e* as a <u>noun</u>.

When Should You Use *Affect?*

Affect with an *a* means "to influence," as in, "The arrows affected Ardvark," or "The rain affected Amy's hairdo." *Affect* can also mean, roughly, "to act in a way that you don't feel," as in, "She affected an air of superiority."

When Should You Use *Effect*?

Effect with an *e* has a lot of subtle meanings as a <u>noun</u>, but to me the meaning "a result" seems to be at the core of all the definitions. For example, you can say, "The effect was eye-popping," or "The sound effects were amazing," or "The rain had no effect on Amy's hairdo."

Rare Uses of *Affect* and *Effect*

Affect can be used as a noun when you're talking about psychology--it means the mood that someone appears to have. For example, "She displayed a happy affect." Psychologists find it useful because they know that you can never really understand what someone else is feeling. You can only know how they *appear* to be feeling.

And, *effect* can be used as a <u>verb</u> that essentially means "to bring about," or "to accomplish." For example, you could say, "Aardvark hoped to effect change within the burrow."

Need More Help?
- Bedford Handbook: pg.790
- Online Quizzes:
  <u>http://www.grammarbook.com/grammar_quiz/effect_vs_affect_1.asp</u>
  <u>http://www.affectvseffect.com/quiz.html</u>
  <u>http://www.grammar-quizzes.com/affect-effect.html</u>

Information from Grammar Girl

Among/Between

Use **between** when you are talking about distinct, individual items, even if there are more than two of them.

> *Example: He chose **between** St. John's, St. Thomas, and the University of Minnesota.*

Use **among** when you are talking about things that aren't distinct items.

> *Example: He chose **among** the colleges in Minnesota.*

Incorrect:

1. The girl chose *among* an apple and an orange.

2. The student needed to choose *between* the classes offered by his college.

Correct:

1. The girl chose **between** an apple and an orange.

2. The student needed to choose **among** the classes offered by his college.

Also remember that among and between convey **different ideas about location**. John walked among the people conveys the idea that John was walking through a large crowd. John walked between the people conveys the idea that John walked between two people or walked on some kind of pathway between two groups of people.

Need More Help?
- Online Quizzes:
  http://www.softschools.com/quizzes/grammar/among_between/quiz3174.html
  http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/radio/specials/1723_gramchallenge46/page2.shtml
  http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/radio/specials/1723_gramchallenge46/page3.shtml
  http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/between-versus-among.aspx#BetweenQuiz

Amount vs. Number

Definition

- **Amount:** The total of two or more quantities (FreeDictionary.com).
- **Number:** A concept of quantity that is or can be derived from a single unit, the sum of a collection of units, or zero (FreeDictionary.com)

Rules

Use "amount" with quantities that cannot be counted. Use "number" with those that can.

Examples

1. I have a number of assignments to do this weekend.
2. The amount of pollution in the air is impossible to know without scientific technology.
3. There are a fair number of students in the class.
4. What amount of sugar do I need to make chocolate chip cookies?

Need More Help?

- Bedford: pg. 791
- Explanation:
  http://www.drgrammar.org/frequently-asked-questions
- Online Quiz:
  http://www.proprofs.com/quiz-school/story.php?title=tplc-amountnumber-quiz
- Video:
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8Do9bDfd1Y

Less/Fewer

Fewer is the comparative used to describe plural, discretely quantifiable nouns, while less is the comparatives used when speaking of a grammatically singular noun (including mass nouns).

Fewer vs. Less (Simplified)

Fewer is used when referring to things that can be counted.

Less is used when referring to uncountable and usually abstract nouns.

"What can I say? I was an English major."

Use "fewer" with countable, individual things, and "less" with uncountable amounts, volumes, etc. So: "I should drink less coffee," but "I should eat fewer doughnuts."

But it's not as simple as plural (fewer) vs. singular (less). Sometimes "less" is correct even with a plural noun. For example, the expression *less than* is used in front of a plural noun that denotes a measure of distance, amount, or time.

Example: We will go on vacation in less than four weeks.
Example: She owes him less than $30.
Example: We had less than 25 miles to go but ran out of gas.

Also, use less with the expression *or less.*

Example: Write a paragraph about an environmental issue in 200 words or less.

Correct

Ex. There were fewer customers than anticipated.
Ex. I have less patience than Ted.

Incorrect

Ex. There are less computers available in the lab today.
Ex. In fewer than three weeks, she will be leaving for Europe.

Need More Help?

- Online quizzes:
  http://www.usingenglish.com/quizzes/54.html
  http://www.towson.edu/ows/indexexercises.htm -->scroll down to header "Commonly Confused Words"

There is conflicting information on this rule when applied to the phrase "10 items or less. In some instances, the rule states that the phrase should state "10 items or fewer" but in other cases the rule said this phrase had become idomatic and is an exception.

Loan/Borrow

Definition/explanation of the term:

Borrow means "to take," while lend and loan mean "to give."

Rules:

You can only borrow something from someone. Try substituting "take" for borrow and "give" for lend or loan - the correct word will immediately be clear.

Examples of incorrect vs. correct usage:

      Correct
            Ex. Loan (or lend) me a pen.
            Ex. May I borrow your book to study?
      Incorrect
            Ex. Borrow me a pen.
            Ex. I can't afford to borrow you any money.

Need More Help?

- Online Quizzes:
  http://a4esl.org/q/h/vm/cloze3.html

Than/Then

Than is a conjunction used in comparisons; *then* is an adverb denoting time (Bedford pg. 802).

Use **than** when you are comparing something to something else. Use **then** when you are talking about when something happened.

Incorrect:

1. I am better at math *then* Jenny.

2. I went to the store and *than* went home.

Correct:

1. I am better at math **than** Jenny.

2. I went to the store and **then** went home.

Need More Help?
- Bedford: pg. 802
- Online Quizzes:
  http://www.esldesk.com/common-errors-english/than-then
  http://esl.about.com/library/quiz/bl_than.htm