

1.34 Using the correct word type

An error found in some students' writing is the use of the wrong "type" of word, that is, confusion between verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs etc.

Do not rely on spellcheck - it will always miss these mistakes. You may find it much easier to find these mistakes if you read your work aloud or listen to it (try using one of the 'text to speech' websites online).

For example:

*The **important** of the discovery cannot be denied.* (should be "importance")

*This type of revenue is very **importance**.* (should be "important")

If you do make this kind of mistake there are two basic pieces of advice:

You need to become sensitive to the different types of **word endings**, to know, for example, that the ending "-tion" is very often for a noun; that "-ly" very often signifies an adverb. Make yourself some lists, and make sure you know when the different types of words are used. An adjective, for example, is associated with a noun (an object, a person, an idea etc); an adverb with a verb.

Buy yourself a good dictionary and learn to use it effectively. The Collins Cobuild English Language dictionary, for example, has a column telling you the type of word and gives practical examples of the words in use. Be very careful with the use of electronic dictionaries and small monolingual dictionaries, as these could be misleading.

These are the main word types which may cause confusion:

Nouns

Nouns are words which refer to people, things or ideas. For example, girl, door, hunger.

They are often preceded by some kind of determiner or article, such as this, those, my; a/an, the, or by an adjective describing the word. Associated verbs almost always come after the noun. Nouns can be countable (made into a plural), for example, book, tutor, or uncountable (cannot be made into a plural), for example, research, staff.

Nouns can also be used as if they were adjectives:

a *Sunday* newspaper

the *staff* restaurant

And verbs can become nouns by adding –ing:

walking is good for you

talking is not allowed

Note that certain nouns can be used as verbs:

paper: *a ream of paper* *to paper the bedroom* (=put wallpaper up)

chair: *a comfortable chair* *to chair a meeting*

screen: *a 17" screen* *to screen applicants for a job*

Verbs

Verbs are used with nouns to express what that noun “does” or what happens to it:

The girl *studies* Spanish in the evening.

The door was *repaired* last week.

Verb forms in English are very simple. A regular verb has just four forms: *look*, *looks*, *looked* and *looking*. Meaning is often expressed through an associated modal auxiliary verb such as *can*, *should*, or *might*: in this case the main verb is always in the base (infinitive) form:

It *might* rain tonight.

You *should* write around 2000 words.

Alternatively, forms of the verbs *be* and *have* are used with the main verb:

It is *becoming* cheaper to fly.

They *have started* work on their project.

Adjectives

These are words which “describe” or tell you more about a noun: *red*, *expensive*, *difficult*.

They always come before the associated noun: the *red balloon*.

Adjectives never ‘agree’ with the noun, i.e. they don’t need an –s if the noun is plural: *the expensive book* or *the expensive books*.

Adjectives usually can't be made into nouns. You can't say *I'd like the green*. Instead, you need to say *the green one* or *the green tie*. One exception is when some colours are made plural to describe, for example, a football team (Birmingham City are *The Blues*), although this is rare.

In standard English, adjectives cannot be used as adverbs; you can't say *he sang really good*, but instead *he sang really well*.

See the note above about nouns acting as adjectives.

Adverbs

Adverbs add information about an action, event or situation. They tell us when, how or where something happens. For example: *sometimes, gradually, everywhere*.

Words ending in *-ly* will very often be adverbs, but there are many adverbs which do not end in *-ly*. There are also some adjectives which end in *-ly* (eg. *friendly*); these cannot be made into an adverb, but instead you would say, for example, *in a friendly way*.

Exercise

Find the errors and correct them.

- 1 The problem is to find the people who are **response** for the situation.
- 2 People may be **temporary** out of a job.
- 3 This essay will analyse the **important** of the shadow economy.
- 4 They claim they are unemployed, but, in fact, they are in a **well** situation.
- 5 Some of the gains from tax evasion will flow to the **consume** as well.
- 6 GDP shows how much the economy in that country has **growth**.
- 7 The government has found it **necessarily** to raise interest rates.
- 8 The teacher usually **reliant** on one book.
- 9 The information provided will be treated **confidential** by the researchers.
- 10 To avoid **unstable** in sales, companies tend to diversify.

Exercise answers

- 1 The problem is to find the people who are **responsible** for the situation.
"Response" is a noun; "responsible" the adjective.
- 2 People may be **temporarily** out of a job.
"Temporary" is an adjective; "temporarily" the adverb.
- 3 This essay will analyse the **importance** of the shadow economy.
"Important" is a adjective; "importance" the noun.
- 4 They claim they are unemployed, but, in fact, they are in a **good** situation.
"Well" is an adverb; "good" the adjective.
- 5 Some of the gains from tax evasion will flow to the **consumer** as well.
"Consume" is a verb; "consumer" the noun.
- 6 GDP shows how much the economy in that country has **grown**.
"Growth" is a noun; "grown" is part of the verb.
- 7 The government has found it **necessary** to raise interest rates.
"Necessarily" is an adverb; "necessary" the adjective.
- 8 The teacher usually **relies** on one book.
"Reliant" is an adjective; "relies" is the verb (or "to be reliant")
- 9 The information provided will be treated **confidentially** by the researchers.
"Confidential" is the adjective; "confidentially" the adverb.
- 10 To avoid **instability** in sales, companies tend to diversify.
"Unstable" is the adjective; "instability" the noun.