



tipsheet

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Using Tricky Latin Words Correctly

Latin words and phrases appear frequently in the business environment. Though using Latin words incorrectly seems to be increasingly “acceptable,” all business students and professionals need to demonstrate proper usage, particularly when networking and communicating in the workplace.

Alumnus/Alumni

People use the word “alumni” when referring to a university’s graduates and often fail to use the correct singular and plural forms. Also, many use “alum” in casual conversation; most stylebooks indicate that writers should use the correct Latin term except when writing a direct quotation from a person who used “alum.” To be accurate, notice that the Latin word “alumnus” has four forms, depending on gender and number of people being identified.

Alumnus: A male graduate of an institution (male singular)

Alumna: A female graduate (female singular)

Alumnae: A group of female graduates (female plural)

Alumni: A group of either male or mixed gender graduates (male plural, mixed gender plural)

Incorrect: She is an alumni of Kenan-Flagler Business School.
He is an alumni of Kenan-Flagler Business School

Correct: She is an alumna of Kenan-Flagler Business School
He is an alumnus of Kenan-Flagler Business School

“I.e.” and “E.g.”

The Latin abbreviations “i.e.” and “e.g.” are often used interchangeably. However, each abbreviation has a distinct meaning and usage rules.

I.e.: Stands for “*id est*” and takes the place of phrases such as “*in other words*” or “*it/that is*.”

Example: Please prepare an ROI analysis of our best performing product category, i.e., canned beverages.

E.g.: Stands for “*exempli gratia*,” meaning “*for example*.” This abbreviation introduces an illustration of what has just been said but does not presume a complete list of examples.

Example: Many advertising possibilities for the new product line exist, e.g., magazine ads, television commercials, and in-store displays.

Other commonly misused Latin words

People commonly misuse the singular and plural forms of the following common Latin words:

Singular Form	Plural Form
Datum	Data
Agendum	Agenda
Criterion	Criteria
Medium	Media

Knowing that data, agenda, criteria, and media are plural nouns will help you remember to use a plural verb.

Example: The data are in the computer.

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