



# tipsheet

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## Commonly Misused Words

The English language is full of frequently confused and misused words. While some of these “mistakes” slowly make their way into everyday usage, other errors reflect poorly in both written and verbal communication. Listed below are some frequently confused word pairs.

### Continual vs. Continuous

Continual implies a steady repetition of an event while continuous means uninterrupted or unbroken.

For example:

- The merger created a source of *continual* litigation for the law firm.
- All Eric saw ahead was a *continuous* stretch of highway.

### Economic vs. Economical

Economic describes that which is related to the economy while economical describes something that saves money or resources.

For example:

- Government officials attributed the rise in unemployment to the *economic* downturn.
- Brooke bought an *economical* car so she would save money on gas.

### Ensure vs. Insure

Ensure means to make certain while insure is the act of guaranteeing against loss or harm.

For example:

- Please *ensure* that our case assignment is submitted by tomorrow morning.
- Heather *insured* her new car against damage from uninsured motorists.

### Farther vs. Further

Farther applies to a physical distance while further applies to an unmeasured, figurative distance.

For example:

- Dave's traveled *farther* during his trip to Asia than Joe traveled during his trip to Europe.
- We should not discuss the case any *further*.

### Historic vs. Historical

Historic refers to an event of great significance, regardless of how recently the event occurred, while historical describes that which is related to history.

For example:

- Those in attendance will remember the *historic* signing of the peace treaty for years.
- Professor Jones loves to read *historical* novels.

### Lay vs. Lie

In the present tense, lay always takes a direct object (e.g. you lay *something* down) while lie does not take a direct object.

For example:

- Sean *lay* the book down before responding to his professor's question.
- Kate will need to *lie* down for a nap after running the race.

### Principal vs. Principle

Principal can be either an adjective or a noun, while principle is always a noun.

For example:

- Principal (adjective): Chief, main, leading, most important. "Teamwork is the *principal* virtue of successful leaders."
- Principal (noun): The most important person in a group of people, the head of a school, borrowed money. "Only \$2,000 of *principal* remains on John's mortgage."
- Principle (noun): A rule or standard. "Beth understood most corporate finance *principles*."

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