

## Style &amp; Editing

## Checking Word Choice

1. Incorrect word choice sometimes occurs when two words are *similar in spelling and/or sound*. Here are some examples:

a) **their/there/they're**

- Ⓐ The students got straight As on *their* midterm. (possessive adjective)
- Ⓑ Last year *there* were 787 international graduate students from China studying at SFU. (pronoun)
- Ⓒ *They're* going to Hawaii for Christmas. (a contraction of "you are"; often followed by the present participle [verb form ending in -ing])

b) **your/you're**

- Ⓐ What's *your* major? (possessive adjective nearly always followed by a noun)
- Ⓑ *You're* going to be late! (a contraction of "you are"; often followed by the present participle verb form ending in -ing)

c) **advice/advise**

- Ⓐ Peer educators *advise* their students on how write better essays. (verb)
- Ⓑ If you need help writing a better essay, make a consultation to get some helpful *advice* from a peer educator. (noun)

d) **another, other, others, the other**

- Ⓐ One kind of natural disaster is a tsunami; *another* type is an earthquake. (another is used only with singular nouns)
- Ⓑ Other natural disasters are typhoons and tornados. (*other* means *more of the group* and can modify either uncountable nouns or plural nouns)
- Ⓒ Some students like to study in the library; *others* prefer the cafeteria. (The plural pronoun *others* means *different members of a group*)
- Ⓓ One sibling likes to get up early; *the other* one likes to sleep late. (adjective; *the other* means *the rest of the group*)
- Ⓔ One sibling likes to get up early; *the other* likes to sleep late. (pronoun; *the other* means *the rest of the group*)

e) **already/all ready**

- Ⓐ Are you all ready to go? (all ready means *entirely ready*.)
- Ⓑ I've already eaten. (already means *previously*)

f) **affect/effect**

- Ⓐ The recession has had a negative effect on sales. (effect is a noun)
- Ⓑ The recession negatively affected sales. (affect is a verb)

2. Some pairs of groups of words are confusing because they are *similar in meaning*. Here are some examples:

**a) during/while**

- ☉ *During* Spring semester the campus sometimes closes due to snow (the preposition *during* is followed by a noun object).
- ☉ Many students have part-time jobs *while* they are going to school. (The adverb *while* is followed by a clause)

**b) between/among**

- ☉ Relationship *between* parents and their children are often very complex. (*between* shows a relationship of two things)
- ☉ SFU is *among* the top-rated universities in Canada. (*among* shows a relationship of three or more things)

**c) amount, number, quantity**

- ☉ Vancouver and Seattle have almost the same *amount/quantity* of rainfall each year. (*amount* and *quantity* are used with uncountable nouns)
- ☉ An increasing *number* of students on campus are multilingual. (*number* is used with countable nouns)

**d) too, very**

- ☉ If the roads become *too* icy, the campus will close. (*too* usually expresses a negative result caused by something excessive)
- ☉ The temperature on top of Burnaby Mountain is *very* cold. (*very* means excessively but does not always express a cause-result relationship)

**e) as, like**

- ☉ Many SFU students volunteer *as* peer educators. (The preposition *as* means *in the role of function of*)
- ☉ *Like* Mexico, Hawaii is a popular vacation spot for Vancouverites. (The preposition *like* means *similar to*).

Handout revised: August 10, 2009™