

3 Things You Can Do to Improve Word Choice in Writing

EPCC English Discipline

As you refine and proofread your writing, one thing that many readers will notice are ill-chosen words. Here are three things you can do that will help you improve word choice in your writing.



1. Know Your Own Pitfalls

As writers, we develop habits. One habit is to use one word when we need another. For example, a common mistake is to use *it's* (it is) when *its* (belongs to it) is needed. For many of us, even though we know the difference between these two words, it has just become habit to write *it's*. If you have a word habit that you know you often get wrong, be extra alert for it when you proofread.

Make a list of your confusable words or bad word habits. Don't be ashamed, we all have them. Then take some time to study them. Look up those words you commonly confuse and focus on them as you proofread. The more you slow down and focus on them, the more often you'll get them right!

A great place to study those confusable words like *it's/its* or *their/there/there* is Professor Paul Brians' [Common Errors in English Usage](#) webpage. He provides short explanations and examples of commonly confused words.



2. Have Someone Read Your Writing Out Loud to You

Other word choice issues come from our brains being super helpful—or at least trying to be. It's a good bet that this has happened to you. Even though you've read and re-read your work before you turn it into your teacher, it comes with mistakes marked that you recognize and know. What you can't figure out is how you could read it over and over and never see that mistake?

Well, that's our brain being super helpful. Our brains know what we meant, so often they will fill in the *right words* for us. The more we read our own work, the less we can see the details. So, how do we overcome this? Well, two good options present themselves.

The best option is to have someone else read your work out loud to you. Because they don't know what words you planned on writing, they have to read the words on the page. Have them read to you and ask them to read it just as you wrote it. Stop them as needed and get those words fixed. Remember, there's no shame in making mistakes—we all do. Learning to fix them is something to be proud of!

One of the things tutors at our writing centers will do with you is read your work out loud to you! They're ready and willing to help with this. So, make sure to take advantage of their knowledge and skill!

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A second option is to have your device read it to you. In fact, having a device read it to you often works in your favor. Because it sounds a bit robotic, and the computer takes pauses at all punctuation, it may help you listen to it and hear it even better.

Computer, Read that to Me!

Here are some links to instructions for how you can get various programs and devices to read your work to you.

- Word/Windows: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/listen-to-your-word-documents-5a2de7f3-1ef4-4795-b24e-64fc2731b001>
- Google Docs: Chrome's Voice Reader extension: <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/read-aloud-a-text-to-spee/hdhdnadidafjejdhmfgjgnolgimiplp/related>
- Mac: <https://www.dyslexicadvantage.org/activate-read-aloud-mac-text-speech-links-also-windows-android/>
- Android: <https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/how-to-read-text-out-loud-android/>
- iPhone: <https://lifehacker.com/make-your-iphone-read-any-text-aloud-with-just-a-few-ta-5870185>

Tips:

- If you have a choice of voices, it may help to use the most robotic one, as that may increase your attention by having a bit of an annoying factor.
- Attention is important. You have to actively listen, letting the words repeat in your mind. Hit the pause button and fix things when you hear something that needs it.
- Don't have it read too fast. Find the options settings and adjust those so that the pace doesn't zoom through it. Having someone or something speed read it to you is not good use of your valuable time.



3. Read, Read, and Read Aloud

The best way to improve word choice is to read and read more. Writing is made for readers. When you read, you are taking in writing. How do you learn how the masters do it? Read. When you read something you like, think about the sound, flow, and style of it. When you read something you don't like, think about the sound, flow, and style of it. Learning from both sides is instructive.

When your teacher provides edits to your wording, read those sentences or sections aloud and see how those things change the sound and flow.

A final thing you can do to get even better at this is to read parts of your homework for all your classes aloud. Even a paragraph or two will help. It will not only help you understand that style of writing, but it will help you develop your style and flow within that field and style of writing; not to mention, reading out loud helps you remember things better and understand complex issues more, so it's beneficial for you as a learner in many ways.