Troublesome Word Pairs: Affect/Effect

There are some words in English that sound similar and may look similar, but are spelled and used differently. Sometimes it can be hard to tell them apart.

Affect and effect

*Affect* is most often used as a verb.
Examples:
How will the falling snow *affect* the opening of school? (future tense verb)
The inspiring movie *affected* the students in a positive way. (past tense verb)

*Effect* is most often used as a noun.
Examples:
The *effect* of falling snow on school openings will be announced. (noun, subject)
The inspiring movie had a positive *effect* on the students. (noun, direct object)

Write a weather report for a news broadcast in which you correctly use both *affect* and *effect* at least twice each and in different tenses. Have a partner check for correct usage and then read the broadcast aloud.

There are other less frequent uses of both *affect* (noun form) and *effect* (verb form).

Examples: Reggie’s voice had an unusual *affect* that made him sound important. (noun)
The purpose of the meeting is to *effect* changes that will help the community. (verb)

Challenge: Use context clues to try to figure out the meanings of *affect* and *effect* in the sentences above. Write your guesses here.

affect: ____________________________________________

effect: ____________________________________________

Use a dictionary or online resource to look up the alternative forms of *affect* and *effect* and practice using them with a partner.
Troublesome Word Pairs: Sit/Set

There are some words in English that sound similar and may look similar, but are spelled and used differently. Sometimes it can be hard to tell them apart.

Sit and set

*Sit* is an intransitive verb. It does not take an object.

Please *sit* down.
Where would you like to *sit*?

*Set* is a transitive verb. It takes an object that receives an action from the verb.

Please *set* the tray down.
You can *set* those items anywhere you like.

*Sit* and *set* are NOT interchangeable. Review the sentences below.

**INCORRECT:** I would like to *set* here. Shall I *sit* plates on the table?
**CORRECT:** I would like to *sit* here. Shall I *set* plates on the table?

Both of these verbs are irregular. See the chart below to review the verb tenses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to sit</td>
<td>he sits</td>
<td>he sat</td>
<td>he has sat</td>
<td>he will sit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to set</td>
<td>he sets(it)</td>
<td>he set (it)</td>
<td>he has set (it)</td>
<td>he will set (it)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Suppose you are the planner of a large dinner party. Write instructions for the people helping you about the placement of dishes and where you would like the guests to sit. Use *sit* and *set* at least three times each in at least two different tenses. Exchange your instructions with a partner and underline all forms of the verbs *sit* and *set* wherever they occur. Check each other’s work for correct usage.
Troublesome Word Pairs: Lie/Lay

There are some words in English that sound similar and may look similar, but are spelled and used differently. Sometimes it can be hard to tell them apart.

**Lie and lay**

*Lie* is an intransitive verb. It does not take an object.

Examples:
- Aunt Rose is tired and needs to *lie* down.
- I will *lie* here on the sofa.

*Lay* is a transitive verb. It takes an object that receives the action of the verb.

Examples:
- Mom said she *will lay* the dress on the bed.
- *Lay* that book on the table.

*Lie* and *lay* are NOT interchangeable. Review the sentences below.

**INCORRECT:** Mario should *lay* on the bed if he is tired. I will *lie* a blanket out for him.

**CORRECT:** Mario should *lie* on the bed if he is tired. I will *lay* a blanket out for him.

One challenging part of these two verbs is found in their conjugations, or how their tenses are formed. Review the chart below.

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<td>she will lie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to lay</td>
<td>she lays (it)</td>
<td>she laid (it)</td>
<td>she has laid (it)</td>
<td>she will lay (it)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you notice from the list above, the past tense of *lie* is *lay*. The past tense of *lay* is *laid*. These forms take practice. See the examples below.

Examples:
- Yesterday, Sally *lay* on the rug and watched TV.
- Ken *laid* the clean cloth on the kitchen table.

Write a series of sentences about the same character using as many forms of both verbs above as possible. Show them to a partner and check each other for correct usage. Challenge: With your partner, practice using the different forms aloud in conversation.
Troublesome Word Pairs: Can/May

There are some words in English that sound similar and may look similar, but are spelled and used differently. Sometimes it can be hard to tell them apart.

Can and may

The helping verb can refers to ability.
Examples:
My mom can run for five miles without stopping!
You can do anything if you put your mind to it.

The helping verb may refers to permission or a possibility.
Examples:
The designer may wish to choose the tiles himself.
You may go out and play after supper.

Can and may are NOT interchangeable. There is a meaning distinction.

HINT: Substitute the words “able to” for can or may. Do you mean, for example, “is able to”? If not, choose may. Review the examples below.

INCORRECT: Can I ride my bike after I do my homework?
CORRECT: May I ride my bike after I do my homework? (The speaker here asks for permission. The question is not, Am I able to ride my bike?)

INCORRECT: May we win the race?
CORRECT: Can we win the race? (The question here is, Are we able to win the race? This is not a question that asks permission.)

Write six sentences that contain the word can or the word may. Include questions as well as statements. Write the sentences again and leave a blank for those words. Have a partner fill in the blank with either can or may. Check each other’s work.
Troublesome Word Pairs: Let/Leave, Teach/Learn

There are some words in English that sound similar and may look similar, but are spelled and used differently. Sometimes it can be hard to tell them apart.

Let and leave

*Let* and *leave* have many shades of meaning. In colloquial, or regional, English, *let* and *leave* are close in meaning but not the same. Use a dictionary to review the many shades of meaning of these two verbs.

In one of its meanings, the verb *let* has to do with allowing or permitting something. To check the word, substitute the word *allow*. Examples:

*Let* me help you with that. (Allow me to help you with that.)

Mary will *let* me be by myself for a while. (Mary will allow me to be by myself.)

In one of its meanings, the verb *leave* has to do with letting something remain. Examples:

Dad will *leave* the pie on the counter for you.

I will *leave* you alone until you feel better.

*Let* and *leave* are NOT interchangeable. Review the examples below of colloquial expressions in English.

**INCORRECT:** Let your brother alone. Leave him be.

**CORRECT:** Leave your little brother alone. Let him be.

Teach and learn

To *teach* something is to impart knowledge. To *learn* something is to receive knowledge. These two verbs are NOT interchangeable.

**INCORRECT:** I will learn you how to solve this math problem.

**CORRECT:** I will teach you how to solve this math problem. I am sure you can learn it.

Write three sentences using *let* and *leave*, and three sentences using *teach* and *learn*. Rewrite the sentences leaving blanks for those words, and have a partner complete the sentences. Check each other for correct usage.