Overused and Discouraged Words and Phrases

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This version of the document is dated 2026-02-05.

To improve English usage, reduce monotony, and enrich English vocabulary in writing and speech, I have compiled these two lists on what not to say and what to say better. Many items in these tables were inspired by Emilio Bernal Labrada, "Good usage prevents abusage", 2018.

The lists could also be useful as a handout to Literacy students from ninth grade and up, or to suggest alternatives to overused and discouraged words for younger students. For my other suggestions on Literacy instruction, see "**Suggestions for Instructional Materials**[1]".

This is an open-source document; see its **source code**[2]. You can send comments on this document on the **GitHub issues page**[3].

1 Overused Words

Instead of just saying…	Try saying…	Notes
Also, …	in addition, furthermore, moreover, further, plus, besides, to add to that, on top of that, not only that, what is more, apart from that, additionally	
almost all	most all, nearly all, all but a few	Inspired by E. Bernal.
another [number] (for example, *another five*)	an additional [number], [number] additional, a further [number], [number] more, [number] extra, an extra [number]	Inspired by E. Bernal.
award winner	awardee, recipient (of an award)	
bad actor	malicious actor, malevolent actor, wrongdoer, evildoer, baddie, malfeasant, illegitimate actor	
bias (*in the sense of 'subjective opinion'*)	prejudice, subjectivity, partiality	Similarly: *biased → prejudiced.*
cause	lead to, provoke, yield, engender, occasion, beget, breed, bring on, bring about, give rise to, produce, result in	Verb.
check out	discover, uncover, learn more about, find out about, see for yourself, consult	In the sense of 'discover', rather than 'register a book to borrow' or 'end a hotel stay'.

Instead of just saying…	Try saying…	Notes
focus on	touch on, concentrate on, center on, emphasize, put/lay emphasis on, zoom in on, put/lay weight on, put/lay an accent on, deal mostly with, prioritize, concern, relate to, be anchored on, be devoted to, devote [*itself*] to, insist on, zero in on, zoom in on	
focused on (for example, *a book (that is) focused on a topic*)	about, dedicated to, devoted to, dealing with, treating of, relating to, involving, concentrated on, concerning, anchored on, directed to, oriented on, aimed at	
good	nice, fine, swell, decent, lovely, admirable, pleasing, pleasant	Words of positive sentiment.
great	very good, fantastic, terrific, remarkable, magnificent, excellent, splendid, wonderful, superb	Words of very positive sentiment.
happen	occur, take place, unfold, come about, manifest, produce itself, present itself, come to pass.	Inspired by E. Bernal.
including [something]	[something] among them, among them [something], above all [something], [something] included, especially [something], even [something], inclusive of [something].	Inspired by E. Bernal.
leave	depart, get out of, exit, step away (from), abandon, go away (from), get away (from), run away (from), walk away.	In the sense of 'go away'.
an event leaves [someone] dead	*an event* kills [someone]; *an event* puts [someone] to death	Inspired by E. Bernal.
an event leaves many (people) dead	*an event* kills many; *an event* [synonym for *causes*] the death of many; *an event* puts many to death	Inspired by E. Bernal.
an event leaves [someone] injured	*an event* injures [someone]	Inspired by E. Bernal.
an event leaves many (people) injured	*an event* injures many; *an event* hurts many; *an event* [synonym for *causes*] many injuries	Inspired by E. Bernal.
little house	housie, housette, houselet, minihouse	Diminutive.
Note that…	Observe that…, Notably…, Notice that…, Take note that…, It should be noted that…, It bears noting that…, Be aware that…, It is worth noting that, It bears mentioning that…, Keep in mind that…, We point out that…, [leave out]	
keep people safe online	keep users safe online, keep Internet users safe, keep internauts safe, protect users online	
jury member	juror	Suggested by E. Bernal.
many people	many	Inspired by E. Bernal.
member (*of an association, club, etc.*)	adherent, individual.	E. Bernal wrote of his concerns about this word's overuse.

Instead of just saying...	Try saying...	Notes
people, persons	men and women, individuals, audience, public, population, anyone..., whoever..., they who..., [leave out]. *Informal:* folks.	More generally, a more specific term than *people* or *persons* is preferred. Inspired by E. Bernal.
people living in [territory]	residents of [territory], inhabitants of [territory]	Also consider, for example: *people living in Italy → Italians.*
(the) professors	the faculty, professorship, professor corps, professor body, body of professors	
say	declare, affirm, assert, express, state, make (it) known, mention, comment, remark. *Depending on context:* note, affirm, add, explain, elaborate, conclude; share, reveal, disclose; opine, give the opinion, argue, contend, maintain; reply, respond, answer; signal, indicate, point out; acknowledge, admit; highlight, emphasize, underline, underscore, stress.	Spanish and French press articles tend to employ numerous synonyms for this word.
sit down with	interview, join ... for an interview, meet, consult with, exchange views with, speak with, talk with, converse with, chat with	Suggested by E. Bernal.
[someone] says (that)...	According to [someone], ...In the words of [someone], ...In [someone]'s words, ...Per [someone], ...As [someone] [synonym for *says*], ...[someone] [synonym for *says*] that...	
[someone] says (that)...	In [someone]'s opinion, ...In the opinion of [someone], ...In [someone]'s view, ...In [someone]'s eyes, ...In [someone]'s estimation, ...For [someone], ...As [someone] believes, ...As [someone] sees it, ...In [someone]'s belief, ...[someone] believes that...[someone] opines that...[someone] considers that...As [someone] puts it, ...	Expressing an opinion.
[someone] says (that) [something] is...	[someone] considers [something] (as)...[someone] labels [something] (as)...[someone] finds [something]...[someone] calls [something]...[someone] pronounces [something]...[someone] declares [something] (as)...[someone] qualifies [something] as...[something] is ... to [someone]for [someone], [something] is...	
[someone] was identified as [name].	[someone] went by the name of [name].[someone] was named [name].[someone], [name], ...	Inspired by E. Bernal.
[someone], identified as [name], ...	[someone], going by the name of [name], ...[someone], named [name], ...[someone], [name], ...	Inspired by E. Bernal.
[something] is used to [do something else]	[something] serves to [do something else].	

Instead of just saying…	Try saying…	Notes
The fact that…	That…	Suggested by Tom Hitchner, UCLA, in an Advanced Placement Daily video.
The fact that *he appeared*	That *he appeared*, *His appearance*, *His appearing*.	Suggested by Tom Hitchner, UCLA, in an Advanced Placement Daily video.
(the) teachers	teachership, teacher corps, teacher body, body of teachers	
use	employ, make use of.	Verb. Also: "*something* is used to…" → *something* is for…, *something* serves to…; "you can use *something* to…" → with *something* you can…, *something* lets you…; *something* helps you….
what's happening	what's going on, what's occurring, what's [synonym for *happening*].	Inspired by E. Bernal.

Another technique to try is to rewrite a text to avoid overused words as much as possible.

2   Discouraged Words

Emilio Bernal, in "Good usage prevents abusage", wrote of his concerns about, among other things, the overuse of *people*, *persons*, *members*, *day*, and *happen*, as well as the unnecessary repetition of words (for example, *He is someone who is reliable*; *She wants what she wants*; *It'll happen when it'll happen*). His work formed the basis of many of the suggestions in the following table.

Don't say…	Say…	Notes
after [something] happened, …	after [something]	Inspired by E. Bernal.
alleged victim	likely victim	Inspired by E. Bernal.
all day today	all day [if *today* is understood], from dawn to dusk (today), from sunrise to sunset (today)	Inspired by E. Bernal.
basically	[leave out]	
before [something] happened, …	before [something]	Inspired by E. Bernal.
because of the fact that	because	Suggested by Tom Hitchner, UCLA, in an Advanced Placement Daily video.
blizzard conditions	blizzard	Inspired by E. Bernal.

Don't say…	Say…	Notes
[adjective] day today (for example, *nice day today*)	[adjective] day [if *today* is understood], it's [adjective] today	Inspired by E. Bernal.
dead people	the dead	Inspired by E. Bernal.
due to the fact that	because	Suggested by Tom Hitchner, UCLA, in an Advanced Placement Daily video.
examples include but are not limited to	examples are	The word "examples" already says that the list is not all-inclusive.
family members	relatives, kin	'Relatives' suggested by E. Bernal.
including but not limited to	including	
individual people	individuals	Inspired by E. Bernal.
injured people	the injured	Inspired by E. Bernal.
is someone who is	is	Inspired by E. Bernal.
is someone who is [adjective] (for example, *is someone who is reliable*)	is [adjective]; is a(n) [adjective] one	Inspired by E. Bernal.
is something that is	is	Inspired by E. Bernal.
it is midnight tonight	it is midnight	Inspired by E. Bernal.
least favorite	least desired, least preferred	Inspired by E. Bernal.
literally (*in the sense of 'absolutely'*)	absolutely, totally, utterly, altogether, downright, completely, certainly; [leave out]***	
moment in time	moment	Inspired by E. Bernal.
most favorite	favorite	Inspired by E. Bernal.
myth (*when a story is not meant*)	falsehood, untruth	
[adjective] night tonight (for example, *nice night tonight*)	[adjective] night [if *tonight* is understood], it's [adjective] tonight	Inspired by E. Bernal.
[number] people/persons	[number]	Leave out *people* or *persons* if understood. Inspired by E. Bernal.
one way or another	either way; [leave out]	Inspired by E. Bernal.
one way or the other	either way; [leave out]	Inspired by E. Bernal.
other people	others	Inspired by E. Bernal.
people's identities	every personal identity, who someone is	Inspired by E. Bernal.
people's lives	life	Inspired by E. Bernal.
people/persons being held/jailed	(the) detainees, the jailed.*In criminal cases:* (the) inmates, the prisoners.	Inspired by E. Bernal.
people/persons know	it is known, it is generally known, it is commonly known, we know	Inspired by E. Bernal.
people/persons complaining	(the) complainants	Inspired by E. Bernal.
people/persons present/attending	(the) attendees, the audience, the attending public	Inspired by E. Bernal.
people/persons think	it is thought, it is commonly thought, it is believed, the general belief is, we think, they believe, by popular belief	Inspired by E. Bernal.
point in time	time, instant, moment	Inspired by E. Bernal.

Don't say…	Say…	Notes
pregnant people	the pregnant, pregnant women	
prevent [something] from happening	prevent [something]	Inspired by E. Bernal.
rain conditions, rainy conditions	rain. *Or as appropriate*: drizzle, showers, squalls, light rain, heavy rain, downpours.	Inspired by E. Bernal.
remove (*in the sense of 'erase' or 'abolish'*)	eliminate, erase, delete, suppress, withhold, take away, get [something] off, get rid of, abolish, repeal, rescind, do away with	It is correct to say "remove [something] from [something else]", speak of "removing" an obstacle or disadvantage, or use in the sense of 'move [something] away'.
(they) saved their lives	(they) were saved, (they) saved their life	Inspired by E. Bernal.
(their) lives, deaths, lifetimes, healths, sakes, identities, futures	their life, death, lifetime, health, sake, identity, future	Inspired by E. Bernal.
This is [program].	*To identify the program:* [program]; You are listening to [program]; You are tuned to [program]. *To present the program:* [program] starts now; We (now) welcome you to [program]; We (now) bring you [program]; Now starting [program]; Presenting [program]; We now present [program]; We now start [program]; It's time for [program].	Identifications of TV and radio programs. Suggested by E. Bernal.
[time] before now	[time] ago	Inspired by E. Bernal.
until such time as	until	
up to but not more than	up to	
[verb] whether or not (for example, *know whether or not*, *determine whether or not*)	[verb] whether**	Suggested by E. Bernal.

Even here, it is worth trying to rewrite a text to avoid discouraged words to the greatest extent possible.

** Use "whether or not B" or "whether B or not" only to mean 'both if B and if not'.

*** In formal writing, use *literally* only to mean 'in the exact sense; not figuratively'.

3   To Improve English Usage Through Word Processing Apps…

What I would like to see is an open-source plugin for popular word-processing applications that finds overused and discouraged words and phrases in a document, such as those mentioned earlier, and suggests corresponding replacements. (A similar practice is found in Web browsers' spell checkers and as a built-in feature in some closed source word-processing apps.) For example, the plugin could look for instances of "sit down with", underline them, and show suggestions such as "interview", "consult with", and so on in a menu when the phrase is selected for a language check.

4   Derivations

Derivations of existing words, so underused a procedure in our language, can enrich the vocabulary of English.

An interesting exercise to try with students is to build—

- the feminine form of some words through suffixes. For example, -an becomes -anesse, -ian becomes -ienne, -ican becomes -ickenne or -icanesse: *Bostonian* becomes *Bostonienne*, *American* becomes *Americkenne* or *Americanesse*, *Puerto Rican* becomes *Puerto Ricanesse* etc., instead of resorting to adding *female* or *woman.*
- the diminutive form of some words through suffixes (for example: -ie, -ette, -kin, -let) or through prefixes (for example: mini-, micro-), without resorting to adding *little* or *small.*

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