

Demon Pairs: Choosing the Right Word

Using the incorrect word can be embarrassing, but in English, the abundance of homophones (words that sound the same but have different meanings) can make proper usage tricky. See if you can identify the correct words in the sentences below. If the word is used correctly, mark it with a C.

1. Premier/premiere

One of the premiere singers of our time, Mexican tenor Javier Camarena, will return to the Los Angeles Opera for a recital.

I saw former Disney CEO Michael Eisner at the premier of Bizet's Carmen.

Most soccer fans watch the English Premiere League.

A prime minister is called a premier.

2. Capital/capitol

The capitol of Colorado is Denver.

The signs pointing to the capital building in Denver are misspelled.

Sometimes workers are referred to as human capitol.

Karl Marx wrote the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*.

3. Exacted/extracted

He felt betrayed, but he extracted his revenge by testifying against them in federal trials.

Scientists extracted data from their large population study.

An authoritarian business leader may exact absolute loyalty.

The board exacted a confession from the officer who committed fraud.

4. Diffuse/defuse

What could have been said or done that would diffuse the mess?

The heat from the new furnace defused throughout the room.

During the Age of Enlightenment, the ideas of liberty and equality were diffused throughout the western world.

The platoon diffused the landmine.

5. Pared/paired

Our department was asked to pare expenses due to the looming recession.

People had accidentally collected too many items that could be paired down.

My new office is smaller than the old one, and I paired down my equipment so it would all fit.

The instructor paired students with partners for small-group work.

6. Dredge/drudge

Resist the temptation to drudge up old history.

The small vessel drudged the bottom of the harbor.

Road crews drudged in the heat all day.
The journalists dredged deeper to reveal new wrongdoing by city officials.

7. Divert/avert

The car accident was so devastating she had to divert her eyes.
If we could predict earthquakes, we might be able to avert disaster.
Traffic had to be averted due to the obstruction in the road.
After much thought we diverted funds to other worthwhile projects.

8. Sow/sew

Falling short of a high-profile goal would sew doubt during a public-health emergency.
Bad actors sow conflict and division among stakeholders.
Modern farming is possible because farmers can plan a time to sow and a time to reap field crops.
The tailor sewed a pocket onto the garment.

9. All together/altogether

The poorly written report was all together unacceptable.
The Beatles song "Altogether Now" was included on the Yellow Submarine soundtrack.
At the end of the night, some gamblers may have spent thousands of dollars all together.
It's best to steer clear of conflict in meetings all together.

10. Faring/airing

The maps will help determine how each state, county, or country is airing.
When the motorcycle tipped over, the faring fell off.
The accounting student wanted to know how she had fared on the CPA exam.
The captain wanted to sail in fair weather only.

Baited/bated

During a TV debate, the moderators were baiting a politician with thinly veiled insults.
The law student awaited the results of the bar exam with baited breath.
The hikers foolishly bated the bear until the animal attacked.
Real-estate agents sometimes bait potential buyers by fudging the location, for example, by saying "Beverly Hills-adjacent."

Due/do

Since new smartphones can easily cost over \$1,000, it's no wonder that wireless customers are making due with their old phones longer than ever.
Can you make due with \$20 and I'll Venmo you the rest tomorrow?
The tech workers who just got fired were due a full month's salary.
The composer finally received the recognition she was due.