

Increasing Vocabulary Power for Writing through Differentiating Confusing Word Pairs

Student Activity Sheet

Activity 1. Lead-in: Describing Cause-and-Effect with Target Words

Instructions: Work in pairs. Fill out the following cloze passage with the following words (affect, effect, impact, influence) to describe the cause and effect of events and phenomena.

Debt management is a crucial aspect of one's financial well-being, as it has the potential to greatly *affect* an individual's overall financial health. The way in which debt is managed can have a profound *impact* on a person's credit score, their ability to secure loans, and even their future financial stability.

The positive *effect* of proper debt management cannot be overstated, as it is essential for maintaining a healthy financial life. By effectively managing debt, individuals can avoid the negative consequences that come with uncontrolled borrowing and spending.

This includes avoiding high interest rates, late fees, and the potential for bankruptcy.

In order to manage debt effectively, individuals must understand the various factors that can directly *influence* their financial situation. This includes being mindful of their spending habits, setting realistic financial goals, and creating a budget to ensure that they are living within their means. Additionally, it is important to prioritize paying off high-interest debt first, as this can greatly reduce the total amount of interest paid over time.

Activity 2: Grammar Battle (SkELL)

Instructions: Work in pairs. Follow the teacher's instructions in the class and complete the following activities. Use SkELL (<https://skell.sketchengine.eu/#home?lang=en>) for the activities.

2.1 "Affect"

In *Examples*, type "affect" in the query bar and identify

(a) Word variations of the word "affect" in the sample sentences;

Affect, affects, affected, affecting

(b) Words collocating **after** "affect" (give five examples)

Everybody, blood sugar levels, health care utilisation, older adults, aquatic life

2.2 "Effect"

In *Examples*, type "effect" in the query bar and identify

(a) Word variations of the word "effect" in the sample sentences;

Effect, effects

(b) Words collocating **before** "effect" (give five examples)

Special effects, placebo effect, the effect, similar effects, side effects

2.3 Based on these results, can you infer the parts of speech of "affect" and "effect"?

Affect is a **verb**.

Effect is a **noun**.

2.4 With the functions of *Examples* and *Word Sketches*, identify common collocations of "affect" (verb) and "effect" (noun).

(a) What words are used to modify "affect" (look for "modifiers of 'affect'")?

Adversely, negatively, directly, severely, significantly

(b) What words are used to modify “effect” (*look for “modifiers of ‘effect’*)?

Side, adverse, negative, sound, positive

2.5 Write three sentences with “effect”, using the verbs and other keywords from *Word Sketches*. (negative, unhealthy, lifestyle, etc.)

1. One negative effect of an unhealthy lifestyle is poor sleeping quality.
2. Smoking has a harmful effect on one’s health.
3. Tornadoes often have devastating effects to Texans.

2.6 Based on the results from the SkELL search, what is the tone commonly associated with “affect” and “effect”?

Effect: Many top words immediately **before** “effect” have a negative sense (e.g., side effects, adverse effects, negative effects); some adjectives **after** “effect” also imply negative reading (dramatic, minimal, negligible) and some verbs **before** “effect” suggest that the effect is negative and has to be lowered (e.g., mitigate, reduce, minimise).

Affect: Top modifiers of “affect” are adverbs that suggest negative meaning (e.g., adversely, negatively, severely). Meanwhile, subjects collocating with “affect” are mainly neutral (e.g., factor, issue, change, condition, decision), although it may collocate with negative words like “disease”, “disorder”, “crisis” and “problem”

2.7 Check *Similar Words* of “affect” as a verb. Find the word that is associated with a similar tone as “affect”, and one associated with a different tone.

Impact: modifiers are adverbs that are mainly negative, e.g., negatively, adversely, severely (although “positively” is also possible).

Influence: modifiers are adverbs that are mainly about strength (no particular tone), e.g., heavily, strongly, greatly, profoundly, deeply.

2.8 “Impact” and “Influence”

With *Examples* and *Word Sketches*, investigate another pair of potentially confusing words “impact” and “influence”:

(a) “Impact” and “influence” as **nouns**: what are the common modifiers?

Impact: negative, environmental, positive, significant, adverse

Influence: undue, strong, considerable, profound, significant

(b) “Impact” and “influence” as **verbs**: what are the common modifiers?

Impact: negatively, adversely, positively, severely, significantly

Influence: heavily, strongly, greatly, profoundly, deeply

Activity 3: Grammar Battle (Netspeak)

Instructions: Work in pairs. Follow the teacher’s instruction in the class, and complete the following activities. Use SkELL (<https://skell.sketchengine.eu/#home?lang=en>) for the activities.

3.1 With the *find the best option* function of Netspeak (i.e., []), find out under what circumstances “impact” and “influence” are used more frequently, for example:

(a) **Negatively/adversely/severely/seriously**: impact

(b) **Heavily/significantly/profoundly/deeply**: influence

3.2 Based on the findings in Activity 3.1, can you tell the tone that is commonly associated with “impact” and “influence” respectively?

“Impact” is more likely to be associated with a negative tone, while “influence” suggests a more neutral tone, as it is often collocated with adjectives or adverbs of degree

Activity 4: Paraphrasing Exercise

Instructions: Paraphrase the following sentences with the search results on SkELL, so that you can find the right collocations for the target words; use Netspeak to determine which expressions are more commonly used. The following is an example.

Ex. Adults’ desire to promote positive, financially self-sufficient identities may **influence** their perceptions and management of debts. (Use “effect” as a noun; start the sentence with “There is”)

A: When adults want to establish positive identities that portray financial self-sufficiency, **there is a possible/ potential effect on how they perceive and manage debts.**

1. Any “bad eggs” pose adverse **effects** on anyone in an organisation. (Use “affect” as a verb)

Any bad eggs **negatively/ adversely affect** anyone in an organisation.

2. The assumption is that the achievement of the project's targets will have a highly positive and beneficial **impact** on those most directly involved with it. (Use “influence” as a verb)

It is assumed that, when the project’s targets are achieved, it **will positively influence** those who are most directly involved with it. (Alternative without “influence”: ... it will benefit those most directly involved with it.)

Activity 5. After-Class Exercise

Instructions: In the following, we provide five other word pairs that are spelt or mean similarly, but may mean or be used differently. With SkELL and/ or Netspeak, find out what words they commonly collocate with.

1. Assume/ presume

Assume: its subjects are often related to research (e.g., model, theory, scenario, calculation, analysis, approach method), and its modifiers often suggest wrongness (e.g., mistakenly, incorrectly, wrongly, erroneously, falsely).

Presume: it seems more likely to be in the passive form (e.g., be presumed), and its collocating adjectives are often relevant to legal or technical terms (e.g., deceased, innocent, dead, extinct, guilty)

Meanwhile, both verbs can be modified by adverbs related to wrongness.

2. Beside/ besides

Beside: it usually follows the main verb, and collocates with another noun (phrase).

From the examples such as “he saw something beside the log” and “The second player stays quietly beside him”, we can infer that “beside” means “next to” as a preposition.

Besides: like “beside”, “besides” is often before noun (phrases). However, it can also be used alone, e.g., “besides, why does meaningful equate alive and meaningless dead”, meaning that it can be an adverb. Meanwhile, from the examples such as “nothing besides medicine ever entered my mind” and “what helps plants grow besides water and nutrients”, we can infer that “besides” is a preposition, but it means “apart from” or “in addition to”.

3. **Continual/ continuous**

Continual: it can mean similarly to “continuous”, to mean “repeating non-stop”; however, from the examples “continual police raids”, “continual small power changes” and “continual violence”, “continual” suggests instances of events happening repeatedly (i.e., one raid stops, and another raid begins the next day or so).

Continuous: it suggests that an event is considered a single one, in that it doesn't stop (e.g., “continuous music” and “continuous snow cover” suggests one event that is ongoing)

From Netspeak, we found that “continuous” is collocated with words such as “improvement”, “monitoring”, “variable” and so on, more often than “continual”.

4. **Except/ excerpt**

Except: it is often placed between two contrasting ideas, for example “everyone seems happy except the lonely shark” and “I try and avoid raw things except sushi”. As “except” functions as a link between two ideas, it is likely to be a preposition.

Excerpt: it is often collocated with meanings related to “text” and actions related to texts, such as “personal journal excerpts”, “newspaper excerpts” and “to edited excerpts”. It also has the suffix “-s”, it is likely to be a noun in the examples (while it can be a verb, too).

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