

¶ 1101

NOTE: When the verb *lie* means “to tell a falsehood,” it has regularly formed principal parts (*lie, lied, lied, lying*) and is seldom confused with the verbs just described.

Lay down—lie down. You can *lay down the law*, you can *lay down your life for another*, you can *lay down your arms*, and you can *lay down your cards*. You can even *lay yourself down*. But you cannot simply *lay down*. In every one of these acceptable examples, note that *lay down* takes an object (*law, life, arms, cards, yourself*).

You can *lie down on a bed*, you can *lie down on the job*, and you can *lie down with dogs* (but then you are likely to get up with fleas). You can even simply *lie down*, because this verb phrase does not require an object. It is, however, often followed by a prepositional phrase (*on a bed, on the job, with dogs*). For more on the proper use of these phrases, see *Lay—lie* above.

Learn—teach. *Learn* (principal parts: *learn, learned, learned, learning*) means “to acquire knowledge.” *Teach* (principal parts: *teach, taught, taught, teaching*) means “to impart knowledge to others.”

I *learned* from a master teacher.

A first-rate instructor *taught* me how.

(**NOT:** I *was learned* by a master teacher.)

I *was taught* by a first-rate instructor.

Leave—let. *Leave* (principal parts: *leave, left, left, leaving*) means “to move away, abandon, or depart.” *Let* (principal parts: *let, let, let, letting*) means “to permit or allow.” **TEST:** In deciding whether to use *let* or *leave*, substitute the appropriate form of *permit*. If *permit* fits, use *let*; if not, use *leave*.

I now *leave* you to your own devices. (Abandon you.)

Mr. Morales *left* on the morning train. (Departed.)

Let me see the last page. (Permit me to see.)

The expressions “Leave me alone” and “Let me alone” are both acceptable and are commonly considered to have the same meaning. However, some authorities suggest a slight difference between them: “leave me alone” is said to express the wish to be entirely by oneself, for someone else to withdraw; “let me alone” is said to express the wish not to have one’s plans or actions interfered with.

Lectern—podium. See *Podium—lectern*.

Lend—borrow. You lend money *to* someone; you borrow money *from* someone. Do not use *borrow* as a synonym for *lend*.

I *lent* Paul enough money to cover this month’s rent.

(**NOT:** I borrowed Paul enough money to cover this month’s rent.)

Lend—loan. Although *lend* and *loan* have long been used as verbs, it is preferable to use *loan* only as a noun.

Hal has asked for a *loan* of \$500, and I’ll be glad to *lend* it to him.

(**RATHER THAN:** I’ll be glad to *loan* it to him.)

Less—fewer. See *Fewer—less*.

Less than. See *More than—over—nearly—almost—less than—about—around*.

Let–let’s. A pronoun that follows the verb *let* must be in the objective case.

Let *him* who created this mess be the one to clean it up.

(**NOT:** Let *he* who created this mess be the one to clean it up.)

Let’s is a contraction of *let us*. Since *us* is an objective form, any pronouns that refer to *let’s* also have to be in the objective case.

Let’s *you and me* try to work out a compromise we can both live with.

(**NOT:** Let’s *you and I* try to work out a compromise we can both live with.)

If you feel that “Let’s you and me” sounds awkward, simply omit “you and me.”

Let’s try to work out a compromise we can both live with.

It is true that T. S. Eliot began a famous poem with these words: “Let us go then, you and I.” Those of us who are not highly acclaimed poets, however, need to follow the standard grammatical guideline, which calls for pronouns to agree with their antecedents.

Libel–slander. Defaming a person in writing is considered an act of *libel*. Using spoken words to defame a person is considered an act of *slander*.

Lie–lay. See *Lay–lie*.

Lie down–lay down. See *Lay down–lie down*.

Like–as–as if. *Like* is correctly used as a preposition. Although *like* is also widely used as a conjunction in colloquial speech, use *as*, *as if*, or a similar expression in written material.

We need to hire another person *like* you.

Kate, *like* her predecessor, will have to cope with the problem.

As I told you earlier, we will not reorder for six months.

(**NOT:** *Like* I told you earlier, we will not reorder for six months.)

It looks *like* snow.

It looks *as if* it will snow.

(**NOT:** It looks *like* it will snow.)

Mary looks *like* her mother.

Mary looks *as* her mother did at the same age.

OR: Mary looks the way her mother did at the same age.

(**BUT NOT:** Mary looks *like* her mother did at the same age.)

COLLOQUIAL USAGE: Ann Richards, former Governor of Texas, made this observation on the role of women in today’s society: “Like we say in Texas, the roosters may crow but the hens deliver the goods.”

NOTE: When using *like* as a preposition, be alert to the possibility that your reader could mistakenly interpret *like* as a verb on first encounter.

CONFUSING: Part of our mission is to make people like lawmakers more sensitive to the needs of those without medical insurance.

CLEAR: Part of our mission is to make lawmakers and others more sensitive to the needs of those without medical insurance.

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