Use the (Right, Rite, Wright, Write) Word

Spellcheckers reveal many errors, but they fail to detect wrong words that sound almost right. Circle the incorrect words below and replace them with the correct words.

1. For duel reasons, his voice waivered as he explained the principle tenents of his faith, bearing his sole that Sunday. He tried not to lose his barings as he walked down the aisle. His wife had put him through the ringer and he was aggravated.

2. You have three alternatives: Buy a lightening rod, gather tender for the fire, or choose inflammable (not flammable) jackets.

3. Frowning at the defendant, the eminent prosecutor asked for punitive damages. Trying to remain disinterested, the judge canvassed the jurors, but his tone implied doubt.
   - “Eminent” means “prominent”; “imminent” means “coming soon.”
   - “Uninterested” means “not interested”; “disinterested” means “neutral, objective.”
   - “Canvas” is cloth; to “canvass” is to survey.
   - To “imply” is to suggest without saying; to “infer” is to conclude based on evidence. “Imply” is to “infer” as “pitch” is to “catch.”

4. After ending his grisly tale, the defence attorney asked the highly touted judge to waive extradition, citing his client’s laudable accomplishments.
   - “Grizzly” (a bear) is not “grisly” (horrible) or “gristly” (full of gristle).
   - “Defense,” here, is American spelling; “defence” is British.

ANSWERS:

1. For dual reasons, his voice waivered as he explained the principal tenents of his faith, baring his soul that Sunday. He tried not to lose his bearings as he walked down the aisle. His wife had put him through the wringer and he was irritated.
   - A “wringer” is rollers on an old-fashioned washing machine through which water is wrung from laundered clothing.
   - “Aggravated” means “to make worse something that is already bad” (“her headache was aggravated by tension”).

2. You have three options (or choices): Buy a lightning rod, gather tinder for the fire, or choose nonflammable jackets.
   - Use “alternative” for one of two choices (you have “two alternatives”). Use “option” or “choice” for three or more choices.
   - “Flammable” and “inflammable” are both used to indicate that something catches fire easily; it’s best to avoid using “inflammable,” which readers may interpret as “nonflammable.”

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4. After ending his grisly tale, the defense attorney asked the highly touted judge to waive extradition, citing his client’s laudable accomplishments.
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For more details, check out Brian’s Common Errors in English: [www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/errors/errors.html](http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/errors/errors.html)

Also see Notorious Confusables: [www.grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/notorious.htm](http://www.grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/notorious.htm) (Part 1)
[www.grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/notorious2.htm](http://www.grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/notorious2.htm) (Part 2).

For general links on style: [www.writersandeditors.com/style__grammar__word_choice__and_pronunciation_57354.htm](http://www.writersandeditors.com/style__grammar__word_choice__and_pronunciation_57354.htm)

Pat McNees ([www.patmcnees.com](http://www.patmcnees.com)) was a book editor (Harper & Row and Fawcett) before becoming an independent journalist, writer, and editor ([www.writersandeditors.com](http://www.writersandeditors.com)). You’ll find more links to helpful explanations of grammar here: [www.writersandeditors.com/work4.htm](http://www.writersandeditors.com/work4.htm)