

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 dual reasons, his voice waived as he explained the principle tenants of his faith, bearing his sole that Sunday. He tried not to loose his barings as he walked down the isle. 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 defendent, the imminent persecutor asked for putative damages. Trying to remain uninterested, 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 grizzly tale, the defence attorney asked the highly tauted judge to wave extradition, siting his client’s laudatory accomplishments.

ANSWERS:

1. For **dual** reasons, his voice **wavered** as he explained the **principal tenets** 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*.”

For more details, check out Brian’s Common Errors in English: www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/errors/errors.html#errors.

Also see Notorious Confusables: www.grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/notorious.htm (Part 1) 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.

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