



# Affect or Effect

The **affect/effect** distinction poses a challenge for many writers. Because these words are commonly used, it is worth investing a little time to learn the distinction between them. This handout will cover the meaning and difference between **affect** and **effect** and outline some grammar guidelines to help you learn how to correctly use **affect** and **effect** in sentences. Guidelines will be accompanied by examples. You will also be able to test your understanding of the **affect/effect** distinction with a challenge exercise.

## Effect

The definition of **effect** (NOUN) is as follows: “An **effect** is a change that is caused in a person or thing by another person or thing” (Collins Cobuild Dictionary, 1990, p. 451). In other words, **effect** is a noun used to denote a consequence, an outcome, a result, or an influence.

Here are some guidelines for using **effect**. Each guideline will have one or more example.

### Grammar guideline 1:

Write **effect** (not **affect**) if you could use another noun, such as **consequence** or **outcome**, in place of **effect**, without changing the meaning of the sentence. In the following example, the sentence has the same meaning when **effect** is replaced by outcome.

#### Example:

Sentence 1: The interventions had many positive **effects**.

Sentence 2: The interventions had many positive **outcomes**.

### Grammar guideline 2:

Write **effect** (not **affect**) before or after articles and prepositions such as **an**, **the**, **of**, and **on**. These articles and prepositions indicate that a noun form is needed. The following example demonstrates the use of **effect** in sentences containing articles and prepositions.

#### Example:

The policy had **an** unexpected **effect** on enrolment.

## Affect

The definition of **affect** (VERB) is as follows: “If something **affects** someone or something else, it influences them or causes them to change in some way” (Collins Cobuild Dictionary, 1990, p.

24). In other words, **affect** is a verb used to indicate an action that has a consequence on someone or something.

Here are some guidelines for using affect in a sentence. Each guideline will have one or more associated example.

### **Grammar guideline 1:**

Write **affect** (not **effect**) if you could use another verb, such as **alter** or **influence**, in place of **affect**, without changing the meaning of the sentence. In the following example, the sentence has the same meaning when **affect** is replaced by **influence**.

#### **Example:**

Sentence 1: The new Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation will **affect** many aspects of our work.

Sentence 2: The new Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation will **influence** many aspects of our work.

### **Grammar guideline 2:**

In most instances one would expect to use **affect** when using the suffixes **-ed** or **-ing**, or when using a modal like **should**, **might**, **can**, or **will**. These forms indicate that a verb form is needed. (Note: there are instances where **effect** can be used with the suffixes **-ed** or **-ing**, but these are less commonly encountered.) In the following examples, sentence 1 shows the use of **affect** with the modal “**can**” and sentence 2 shows the use of **affect** with the “**-ed**” suffix.

#### **Examples:**

Sentence 1: He studies how violence in movies **can affect** children’s behaviours.

Sentence 2: His remarks deeply **affected** me.

## **Challenge Exercise:**

In the following paragraph you will encounter several numbers in square brackets followed by either **affect/effect**. In each instance decide whether **affect** or **effect** is the correct choice for the sentence. The key to the challenge exercise can be found at the end of the handout.

### **Challenge paragraph:**

Many factors [1] **affect/effect** readability, that is, the ease with which a piece of writing can be read. For example, the distance between the subject of the sentence and the verb can have an [2] **affect/effect** on readability, as can sentence and word length. Even the layout of a text can [3] **affect/effect** how easily it can be read. Can you suggest other factors that might influence the [4] **affect/effect** of readability in a document?

## Less Common Uses of Affect and Effect

There are rarer uses of **affect** and **effect** that you may encounter from time to time. Here are two less common usages, with examples.

### Usage 1:

**Effect** as a verb. Effect can be used as a verb meaning to implement or put into place.

**Example:** The new government wanted to **effect** rapid changes.

### Usage 2:

**Affect** as a noun. Affect can be used as a noun meaning a person's emotional presentation. This use as a noun is common in psychology.

**Example:** She had a cheerful **affect**.

## Challenge Exercise Key:

How did you do on the challenge exercise? The correct choice for each number is as follows:

[1] **affect**

[2] **effect**

[3] **affect**

[4] **effect**

### Challenge paragraph key:

The paragraph below indicates the correct word choices for each numbered example, as they appear within the challenge exercise paragraph:

Many factors [1] **affect** readability, that is, the ease with which a piece of writing can be read. For example, the distance between the subject of the sentence and the verb can have an [2] **effect** on readability, as can sentence and word length. Even the layout of a document [3] **affects** how easily it can be read. Can you suggest other factors that might influence the [4] **effect** of readability in a document?