Affect and effect are easily confused because they look alike. Further, although affect is normally a verb, effect can be either a verb or a noun, adding to the confusion. You can distinguish the two words by taking a closer look at their definitions.

Affect is a verb that most commonly means “to influence.” When used as a verb, effect means to “bring about” or “cause.” When used as a noun, effect means “result” or “consequence.”

Therefore, to choose between affect and effect, you must first consider whether you are using the word as a verb or a noun. If you are using it as a verb, select affect if you mean “to influence” and effect if you mean “to bring about.” As a noun, effect will normally be the correct choice.

- The new law affects voters in several swing states. (affect used as a verb meaning “to influence”)
- The new law will effect a change in the way states recount votes in close elections. (effect used as a verb meaning “to bring about”)
- It is difficult to gauge the effect of the new law. (effect used as a noun meaning “result”)

Less common meanings for affect and effect are as follows: affect as a verb that means “to put on a pretense or feign”; affect as a noun in psychology that means “emotion”; and effect as a noun meaning “personal possessions.”