

FROM THE LEGAL WRITING CLINIC
WRITING TIP OF THE WEEK

AFFECT AND EFFECT



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 “to accomplish.” 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.”

For more information, see Anne Enquist & Laurel Currie Oates, Just Writing 160-61, 307-08 (3d ed. 2009) and Laurel Currie Oates & Anne Enquist, The Legal Writing Handbook 772 (5th ed. 2010).