

Commonly Misused Words Quiz

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ANSWER KEY

Directions: The following sentences all contain 1 usage error each. Identify the errors and reword the sentences appropriately based on your reading of section §11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases of the *AMA Manual of Style* and the AMA Style Insider.

1. The incidence of postoperative delirium varies significantly, depending on whether the surgery is elective or emergent.

ANSWER: The incidence of postoperative delirium varies significantly, depending on whether the surgery is elective or emergency.

Editor's Note: Use *emergent* to mean *emerging* (as in *Dorland's* section definition of "coming into being through consecutive stages of development, as in emergent evolution") and *emergency* to mean an unexpected event that calls for immediate attention. (<https://amastyleinsider.com/2013/01/23/emergency-emergent-urgent/>).

2. In general, elderly patients who undergo emergency or long, complicated surgeries have a higher frequency of delirium.

ANSWER: In general, elderly patients who undergo emergency or long, complicated operations have a higher frequency of delirium.

Editor's Note: *Surgery* is what a surgeon practices or a particular medical specialty. An *operation* is what a surgeon performs. In this context, there is no such word as *surgeries*. In the UK, *surgeries* are treatment rooms (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

3. Later-onset delirium is often associated with major postoperative complications or side effects of alcohol or sedative withdrawal.

ANSWER: Later-onset delirium is often associated with major postoperative complications or adverse effects of alcohol or sedative withdrawal.

Editor's Note: *Side effect* is the secondary consequence of implementing an agent (usually a drug). The term is often used incorrectly when *adverse effect*, *adverse event*, or *adverse reaction* is intended. Because a side effect can be either beneficial or harmful, a specific term should be used (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

4. The patient older than 70 years of age experienced confusion on postoperative day 3.

ANSWER: The patient older than 70 years experienced confusion on postoperative day 3.

Editor's Note: It is unnecessary and redundant to add *of age* after the number of years. When the terms *older* and *younger* are used, age is implied (see also §11.2.1, Redundant Words) (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

5. The classical symptoms of hyperactive delirium are restlessness, agitation and hyper vigilance and often experience hallucinations and delusions.

ANSWER: The classic symptoms of hyperactive delirium are restlessness, agitation, and hypervigilance and patients often experience hallucinations and delusions.

Editor's Note: In most scientific writing, the adjective *classic* generally means authentic, authoritative, or typical (the *classic* symptoms of myocardial infarction include angina, dyspnea, nausea, and diaphoresis). In contrast, *classical* refers to the humanities or the fine or historical arts (the elements of *classical* architecture can be applied in radically different architectural contexts than those for which they were developed) (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

6. Once discharged, patients who have experienced postoperative delirium need both acute and chronic follow-up.

ANSWER: Once discharged, patients who have experienced postoperative delirium need both short-term and long-term follow-up.

Editor's Note: Avoid the use of *acute* and *chronic* to describe patients, parts of the body, treatment, or medication (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

7. The subjects of the study underwent comprehensive evaluations.

ANSWER: The patient in the study underwent comprehensive evaluations.

Editor's Note: Some consider *subject* (as in *study subject*) to be impersonal, even derogatory, as if the person in the study were in a subservient role. Similarly, the use of *case* is dehumanizing when referring to a specific person (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

8. The primary care provider treated the patient with postoperative delirium.

ANSWER: The primary care physician treated the patient with postoperative delirium.

Editor's Note: The term *provider* can mean a health care professional, a medical institution or organization, or a third-party payer. If the usage refers to a specific provider (eg, physician, hospital), use the name for that provider (eg, pediatrician, tertiary care hospital, managed care organization), rather than the general term *provider*. If the term connotes several providers, it can be used to avoid repeating lists of persons or institutions; however, the term(s) should always be defined at first mention (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

9. The patient had a positive cerebrospinal fluid test.

ANSWER: The patient had a positive cerebrospinal fluid test result.

Editor's Note: Examinations and laboratory tests and studies are not in themselves abnormal, normal, negative, or positive. These adjectives apply to observations, results, or findings (see 19.0, Study Design and Statistics). Avoid the use of *normal* and *abnormal* to describe persons' health status. Results of cultures and tests for specific reactions or microorganisms may be negative or positive. Other tests display a pattern of activity rather than a single feature, and in these a range of normal and abnormal results is possible. These tests include electroencephalograms and electrocardiograms and modes of imaging, such as isotopic scans, radiographic studies, and tomograms (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

10. Once the patient was released from the hospital, additional assistance from a home health nurse may be necessary to assure a safe transition to home.

ANSWER: Once the patient was released from the hospital, additional assistance from a home health nurse may be necessary to ensure a safe transition to home.

Editor's Note: *Assure* means to provide positive information to a person or persons and implies the removal of doubt and suspense (*assure* the study's participants that their test results will be held in complete confidence). *Ensure* means to make sure or certain (ensure the statistical power of the study). *Insure* means to take precaution beforehand (insure his life) (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

11. Functional and cognitive losses are the chief complaints of patients with delirium.

ANSWER: Functional and cognitive losses are the chief concerns of patients with delirium.

Editor's Note: *Chief complaint* has been traditionally used by physicians when taking a patient's medical history. However, *chief concern* may be a better description because *complaint* may be construed as pejorative and confrontational. Also, patients report symptoms and concerns. Avoid "patient complaint" (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

12. At hospital admission, the patient had a fever of 38.2 °C.

ANSWER: At hospital admission, the patient had a temperature of 38.2 °C.

Editor's Note: *Fever* is a condition in which body temperature rises above that defined as normal. It is incorrect to say a person has a temperature if "fever" is intended. Everyone has a temperature, either normal or abnormal (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

13. After release from the hospital, the patient was followed for 90 days.

ANSWER: After release from the hospital, the patient was followed up for 90 days.

Editor's Note: Cases are *followed*. Patients are not *followed* but *observed*. However, either cases or patients may be *followed up* (eg, the maintenance of contact with or reexamination of a person or patient, especially after treatment). Their clinical course may be *followed* (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

14. The patient was nauseous after taking diazepam.

ANSWER: The patient was nauseated after taking diazepam.

Editor's Note: *Nauseous* refers to causing an illness or disgust, and *nauseated* refers to feeling ill or disgust (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

15. The patient was followed up over 5 years.

ANSWER: The patient was followed up for more than 5 years.

Editor's Note: Over may mean either *more than* or *for (a period of)*. In cases in which ambiguity might arise, *over* should be avoided and *more than* used (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).