

## Common mistakes in e-mail English – part 2

Last week we looked at some pairs of words that are commonly interchanged and often misused by non-native English speakers. Below you will find other examples.

### *bored vs boring*

*Bored* describes how a person feels (similar to *excited, interested, etc.*) and *boring* is used to describe how something affects you and your state (similar to *exciting, interesting, etc.*).

Example: I was so *bored* at the conference yesterday that I almost fell asleep.

The conference was so *boring* that I almost fell asleep.

Note: If you say “I was boring at the conference.”, it means you made other people fall asleep!

### *fewer vs less*

*Fewer* is a determiner used with countable nouns (those which have both singular and plural form, e.g. a lesson – lessons), whereas *less* is used with uncountable nouns (those which do not have a plural form, e.g. electricity, information, luggage, etc.).

Example: He was advised to smoke *fewer* cigarettes and drink *less* beer.

### *hard vs hardly*

*Hard* is an adjective meaning “difficult, solid”. The adverb form of the adjective *hard* is *hard*.

*Hardly* is an adverb meaning “only just” or “certainly not”.

Example: We’re finding reliable staff *hard* to come by.

When I moved to our London office, I *hardly* knew anyone there.

### *moral vs morale*

*Moral* is an adjective relating to the standards of good or bad behaviour, fairness, honesty, etc. which each person believes in. *Morale* is a noun denoting the amount of confidence felt by a person or group of people, especially when in a dangerous or difficult situation.

Example: Behavioural tests on primates show how we all share *moral* traits like empathy and cooperation.

The President’s speech boosted the *morale* of the troops.

### *personal vs personnel*

The word *personal* is an adjective that describes something belonging to a person, while *personnel* refers to staff, that is people who are employed in a company.

Example: You should leave your *personal* problems outside the office.

A very low level of motivation was felt among the *personnel*.

### *practice vs practise*

Only British English distinguishes between *practice*, used as a noun, and *practise*, used as a verb. In American English *practice* is used as both a noun and a verb.

Example: We need to put these ideas into *practice*.

To learn a foreign language well you need to *practise* a lot.

A. Underline the correct option in each sentence.

1. This time there were *less/fewer* people at the fundraiser.
2. My *moral/morale* duty is to do everything possible to avoid war.
3. They *practice/practise* in the office for five weeks before they are sent out.

4. Office *personnel/personal* may wear casual clothes on Fridays.
5. Jane tried *hard/hardly* to improve her English.
6. Our supervisor doesn't like Jim because she thinks he's *bored/boring*.
7. He was *surprised/surprising* to find that he had been upgraded to first class.
8. The last two victories improved the team's *moral/morale* considerably.

Key: 1. fewer, 2. moral, 3. practise, 4. personnel, 5. hard, 6. boring, 7. surprised, 8. morale

B. Fill in the blanks in the dialogue with one of the words from the list.

practice · hardly · hard · exciting · excited · personnel · practise · fewer · less

Jim: Hello, Cindy. How are you?

Cindy: Hi. I have some (1)\_\_\_\_\_ news! I got promoted to a (2)\_\_\_\_\_ supervisor.

Jim: Wonderful news! Congratulations! You've worked really (3)\_\_\_\_\_ to get to this position.

Cindy: Yes, I have and I can (4)\_\_\_\_\_ believe that from next month I won't be working in a cubicle, but in a big office. I'm so (5)\_\_\_\_\_!

Jim: Will you have (6)\_\_\_\_\_ people in your new department than in the current one?

Cindy: I heard there will be some cutbacks in the department, but I'm not sure if it means a smaller number of employees or (7)\_\_\_\_\_ money for the yearly budget.

Jim: There are many new challenges waiting for you, but I'm sure you'll be able to put into (8)\_\_\_\_\_ all your knowledge and skills.

Cindy: Thanks for your support. I also need to (9)\_\_\_\_\_ my speech for my first day in the new department.

Jim: Good luck with that too!

Key: 1. exciting, 2. personnel, 3. hard, 4. hardly, 5. excited, 6. fewer, 7. less, 8. practice, 9. practise