

10 Avoiding overused words

As in all languages, in English there are also words which are often overused. Nothing is more boring than reading or hearing “he said” or “nice” all the time. When you are writing an essay or giving a speech or presentation, it is important to vary the words you are using to make what you are saying more interesting. However, do make sure that you use the other words correctly (they might be followed by a different preposition or take an object, etc.)! It is better to have three alternatives that you can use correctly than five or six that you do not feel sure about.

A thesaurus will help you to find alternatives. But remember that the words listed do not all have exactly the same meaning and they are not all used in the same way. Review all the options (look them up in a dictionary to find out their exact meaning if necessary) and then choose the one that fits best.

● 1 Study point

Be specific! When you are writing, you first have to think about what you really mean. For example, if you are talking about a film you have seen, instead of saying it was “**interesting**”, think about *why* it was interesting:

Was it a thriller?	→ gripping
Did it make you think?	→ thought-provoking
Was it a love story?	→ romantic
Did it make you laugh?	→ amusing / entertaining
Did the story interest you?	→ fascinating
Did it present the subject in a new way?	→ refreshing
Did it change your attitude?	→ motivating / inspiring

Did you “like” the film? Or did you **enjoy** it or even **love** it? You could be more precise – maybe you **admired** the acting or perhaps you **appreciated** the special effects.

Another phrase that should be added to your blacklist is **a lot of** – be more specific! Here are a few alternatives:

Followed by a countable
noun

Countless people

A great many people

A considerable number of
people

A large number of people

Followed by an uncountable
noun

Vast amounts of money

A good / great deal of money

A considerable amount of
money

A large amount of money

Note "amount" should only be followed by an uncountable noun!

○ 2 Over to you

Put the correct word in the gaps in each of these sentences.

1. I had a **nice** / _____ time at Jane's party last night - her friends are really **nice** / _____ and the food was **nice** / _____, too.

delicious enjoyable great

2. We had a really **bad** / _____ journey! Jim is a really **bad** / _____ driver and we almost had a **bad** / _____ accident.

serious poor terrible

3. I thought the play was really **good** / _____, didn't you? - Yes, I did. The actors were **good** / _____, too. But it was also a **good** / _____ audience.

superb talented appreciative