

Plain English Lexicon

A guide to whether your words will be understood

Martin Cutts

Foreword by Christine Mowat, past Chair of Plain Language Association InterNational (PLAIN)

June 2011



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Martin Cutts

Plain Language Commission, www.clearest.co.uk

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All errors and absurdities remain my responsibility.

Martin Cutts

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Your comments are welcome

If you have comments on the lexicon, including suggestions for words to include, please send them to the author at Plain Language Commission, The Castle, 29 Stoneheads, Whaley Bridge, High Peak SK23 7BB, UK.

✉ cutts@clearest.co.uk **W** www.clearest.co.uk

Key to abbreviations

adj = adjective; Brit E = British English; n = noun; predet = predeterminer (a word or phrase that quantifies a noun group, like 'both', 'all', 'a lot of'); sb = somebody; sth = something; v = verb.

Foreword

For more than three decades, Martin Cutts has been sharing his explorations and research in plain-language techniques. And now he has revised the ingenious tool he first prepared in 2008 – the 'Plain English Lexicon'.

Specialists in our field believe that language is the property of the people: it is bound to be even more so with access to this lexicon on Plain Language Commission's website. The reason is simple. No longer are words with multi-syllables banned willy-nilly from plain-language documents; nor are one- or two-syllable words immediately embraced because of their brevity. This tool, with its two significant research foundations, the 'Living Word Vocabulary' (LWV) and the British National Corpus (BNC), empowers plain-language writers to expand the vocabulary they use.

In his lexicon, Martin relies on an innovative interlacing of these highly credible resources to draw conclusions about how well understood are the 2,700 words he has drawn from public documents.

The words chosen vary not only in length, but in complexity, in the fields from which they are drawn (legal, medical and financial, for example), and in grammatical functions. Besides the four sets of numerical data, a column on the LWV *meaning or (maybe) plainer term* gives helpful plain-language substitutes. The commentary column adds cautious and flexible additions and caveats. For example, here's what we learn from the entry on the word 'fiscal'. It reports:

- an LWV-US grade level of 10
- an equivalent lowest UK reading age of 15
- 67% of the LWV participants of the US grade 10s understood the word
- the BNC frequency is 1,312 (1,200 or over Martin says is 'fairly common'), and
- as an LWV *meaning or (maybe) plainer term*, 'about money or taxation, financial'.

As a plain-language writer for the public, I feel more encouraged to use 'fiscal' with this knowledge when pitching a document to a specialist public group with the US grade 10 level or UK reading age 15. And I am disinclined to do so if writing to a lower grade or reading age. The fact that the frequency level is higher than the *fairly common* level gives me further support. The Introduction explains that the recommended reading level for adult public documents is generally grade 8 or a reading age of 13. 'Fiscal' is a word that is probably too difficult for non-financial public readers.

If we examine the entry 'fluctuate', even though the BNC frequency is 472, and far below the *fairly common* level, Martin's commentary is instructive:

'Documents about investments often use this word [*fluctuate* with the meaning of *change continually*], for example, "Their value may fluctuate." It's hard to see a clear alternative. Sometimes "...may rise and fall" may do.'

I like Martin's flexible approach in this lexicon. Appendix B emphasizes that frequency data give 'only a rough idea of how well a word is known, but it's far better than nothing'. Choosing apt words when writing to the public is more complex than one might think, and oversimplifying the criteria with absolute rules and readability formulas does not help. The lexicon is a guide to words most members of the public will likely not understand or misunderstand. He leaves the final decisions to us, recommending explanations or glossaries as helpful adjuncts.

This lexicon will put an extra spring into the step of the plain-language movement. Our research architecture is more firmly developed as a result. For years, many of us have counselled writers against the over-simplified views of fewer-syllable-words connected to lower-reading-grade-level theories as the sole source for governing plain-language word choices. Such views reduce the necessary richness and nuances of our plain-language documents. On the other hand, the lexicon helps us avoid the linguistic inflation of words such as 'cognizance', 'deem', and 'terminable'.

To illustrate, compare the frequency levels of these four-syllable words in the lexicon: 'contribution' (8,129), 'criteria' (3,921), 'representation' (3,634), and 'unnecessary' (1,821). Equally interesting are the levels for these more challenging one- and two-syllable words: 'waive' (353), 'peer' (298), 'peruse' (107), and 'abut' (83).

My own oft-quoted example to demonstrate the weakness of a syllable-count criterion is Descartes' 'I think; therefore, I am.' It's first-grade readability, but two of the most interestingly related complex thoughts ever written. Clearly, however, it is an inappropriate sentence, without commentary, for a general public audience.

Enjoy using this fine gift to our field!

Christine Mowat

President, Wordsmith Associates Communications Consultants Ltd
Past Chair, Plain Language Association InterNational (PLAIN)
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Contents

Key to abbreviations	2
Foreword	3
Introduction	4
What's so special about the Living Word Vocabulary?	4
What's in the lexicon	4
How the lexicon can help you	5
Top tips on writing public documents	5
Plain English Lexicon: A–Z	6–95
Appendix A: Style note	96
• Our use of '-ise' and '-ize'	
• Our use of words and figures	
Appendix B: British National Corpus	96
• Use of the British National Corpus data	
• Why do some of the frequencies seem higher or lower than expected?	
• Where does the corpus data come from?	
Appendix C: Other things to read about English	97

Introduction

A common difficulty in writing and editing public-information documents like leaflets, forms, notices and agreements is knowing what words your readers are likely to understand. Authors and editors cope with this by combining knowledge, intuition and guesswork. Some use lists of vocabulary that are said to be appropriate for particular reading ages, though there is then the question of what reading age to assume for the target group. Others use glossaries of 'official' and 'legal' words, which are available from several bodies including Plain Language Commission. Non-vocabulary factors will also be important: good layout, logical flow of information, easy syntax (eg, favouring active-voice verbs), short sentences, and good use of headings and subheadings.

This lexicon takes the idea of a vocabulary list and glossary a little further by drawing on the 'Living Word Vocabulary' (LWV) by Edgar Dale and Joseph O'Rourke, first published in the US in 1976. The lexicon enables you to check whether a word is likely to be understood by your target audience.

What's so special about the Living Word Vocabulary?

The LWV was the result of 25 years' work to find out what written words are known by pupils and students at school grades 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13 and 16 (add 5 for the British equivalents, so US grade 10 is roughly UK school age 15). Current concerns in the US and UK about poor reading skills among adults and school-leavers suggest that literacy levels have not significantly improved since the LWV research was done – and may even have worsened.

The LWV research was deep and painstaking. It covered some 44,000 word meanings and involved 320,000 students. For each word, roughly 200 students were tested using a 3-choice multiple-choice test. The 1979 edition of the LWV explains what was done to ensure maximum validity of the results. The research has been heavily used in compiling the

'World Book Encyclopedia', whose articles have been written to particular grade levels using the LWV's graded vocabulary list. The publishers of the encyclopedia regard the LWV list as an important ingredient in its success. The LWV has been out of print for some years and few copies exist. In the UK, they are even harder to find than in the US.

What's in the lexicon

The lexicon lists about 2,700 of the LWV's words (plus a few others) with notes under the following column headings:

- **LWV** – the lowest US grade level at which the word was understood by at least 67% of those tested. There is a dash in the column if the word is not from the LWV.
- **UK** – the US grade level +5, to give roughly the UK school age at which the word would be understood by an average pupil (broadly, the UK reading age for the word).
- **%** – the percentage of students in the US tests who understood the word at the given LWV level. Where the percentage is less than 50, the word is 'hard' for that group – mere chance would give a score of 33. For some words, especially those at grade 13, the score will be less than the required 67%. The LWV researchers say they did not retest these words at lower grades for lack of time.
- **BNC** – the number of times the word appears in the British National Corpus. The corpus comprises some 100m words from a wide range of late 20th-century sources of modern British English (90% written). To give a very rough guide, I judge that words scoring more than about 1,200 are fairly common.
- **LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term** – most of the first meanings given come from the LWV, sometimes with a little updating. For some words I've added an alternative word or phrase that has a *roughly equivalent* meaning and *may* be clearer. Remember, though, that this booklet is not meant to be a dictionary in the usual sense.
- **Commentary** – for some of the entries, I have added remarks on the word and its alternatives.

I've chosen these 2,700 words because they occur in public-information documents or in drafts that come to us for editing. I've not included some of the commonest words like 'it', 'they', 'him', 'with', 'eat', 'add' and 'her' because these are known by anyone with a basic command of English. Nor have I included rarities like 'exiguous', 'egregious', 'exigency', 'eructate', 'electuary', 'ephemeral' and 'existential' because no sensible author would use them in public-information documents – although 'effluxion', 'adumbrate', 'unicameral', 'oleaginous', 'epidemiological', 'vide' and 'provenance' have occasionally been sighted in the last 20 years. I've included some medical and legal terms because members of these professions often have to write directly to lay people.

My choice from the LWV is subjective and small, these 2,700 words being less than 7% of the LWV total. So it's inevitable that some of the words you'll want to look up will be absent from the lexicon. If I can, I'll make later editions more comprehensive – please suggest additions if you wish.

It may be said that since all the words in the LWV were tested on school students, their scores are irrelevant to words being read by adults. But most people's reading level seems to change little from the time they cease full-time education. They do, of course, learn more about the adult world, which helps them cope with grown-up ideas, and some will broaden their reading and vocabulary in pursuit of a better job or through contact with the literature of a pastime or sport.

It's not easy to know at what reading level to pitch public-information documents for adults. Based on rather complex data from the National Literacy Trust website, I take the average reading age in the UK to be 12–14, so roughly 13. (For more, see 'Writing by numbers: are readability formulas to clarify what karaoke is to song?' available from our website.) A reading age of 13 is the average for a 13-year-old, so it's three years below the reading skill an average pupil should have on leaving secondary school (ie, not very high). The average US adult is thought to read at about the same level, grade 8.

How the lexicon can help you

You can look up a word in the lexicon to see how often it's used and who's likely to know it. When writing for a mass readership, it's sensible to favour words that need a UK reading age of 13 or less or a BNC score of over 1,200 (or both). Higher-level words may need explaining at the point of use or in a glossary. Some readers will infer the meaning of a 'difficult' word from the context or by using a dictionary, but they are then working harder than they may like. Remember, though, that the scores in the lexicon are only a guide and, in the end, you should rely on your own judgement.

The LWV and BNC scores show clearly that not all polysyllabic words should be shunned. Words like 'benefit', 'immediately', 'accumulate' and 'accurate' are easy. To some people, the key to clear writing is getting a good score on a readability test such as SMOG or Flesch–Kincaid. The UK's Basic Skills Agency, for example, suggests that, 'A readability level of under about 10 [on SMOG] will be able to be understood by most people.' Yet this would equate to no more than two words of three syllables every 10 sentences, an extraordinarily low level for most kinds of public-information document (see page 10 of 'Writing by numbers', cited above).

SMOG and several other tests rely mainly on syllable counting for their scores, so authors in thrall to the tests tend to think they must strike out most polysyllabic words. This can lead to characterless, wordy and over-idiomatic writing in which phrases like 'if you abandon your home' become 'if you move away from your home for good and do not tell us', just to avoid a three-syllable word. Of course, replacing a long easy word with a short easy word can be worthwhile if space is tight, even though it won't affect the real readability level.

Top tips on writing public documents

See also www.clearest.co.uk and the 'Oxford Guide to Plain English' (reading list, page 97).

- 1 Consider your purpose and message before starting to write – clear writing and clear thinking go hand in hand.
- 2 Wear the readers' shoes – how would you feel in their position?
- 3 Plan a structure to help the reader, perhaps with headings, bullet lists and a summary of key points at the start.
- 4 In letters and emails, tell the reader clearly, concisely and courteously what has happened, how the situation stands, and what they can expect next.
- 5 Match your writing to the needs and knowledge of the readers – some of them may be baffled by official jargon.
- 6 Write sentences that average 15–20 words.
- 7 Keep the word order simple. In most sentences, put the doer early and follow it with an active-voice verb.
- 8 Take pride in using everyday English, sound grammar and accurate punctuation.
- 9 Where appropriate, use 'I', 'we' and 'you' to make the writing more human.
- 10 Maintain the flow by starting some of your sentences with connectors like 'but', 'however', 'so' and 'because'.
- 11 Use commands when writing instructions.
- 12 Cut unnecessary words.
- 13 Check that the facts and judgement are right. Nothing compensates for inaccuracy or illogicality.
- 14 Pre-test your high-use documents with typical readers.
- 15 Apply common sense and scepticism to all guidance about writing.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
A abandon	6	11	74	4254	give up	An easy word, as the scores show. No need to be wary of all 3-syllable words.
abandoned	6	11	89	298	deserted	
abate	12	17	69	219	decrease, lessen, reduce	'Abate' and 'abatement' are neither well known nor, as the BNC score shows, much seen. Even the Noise Abatement Society has changed its name, to Pipe Down. Local-council letters, though, still advise people to 'abate the nuisance' – strange language to many.
abattoir	16	21	4	93	slaughterhouse	
abbreviate	4	9	74	79	shorten	
abbreviation	4	9	67	229	shortened word form	
abdomen	6	11	77	296	where stomach is	
abdominal	6	11	67	513	about the stomach	
abet	13	18	68	151	assist, help	Rare and old fashioned. 'Aid and abet' is a legal doublet. 'Assist' or 'help' will do.
abeyance	16	21	31	87	not being used, suspension, suspended	For a mass audience, best avoided or explained.
abide	8	13	71	4	live (in a place)	BNC includes only the literal sense.
abnormal	6	11	72	801	unnatural, not normal	
abolish	6	11	85	1874	get rid of	
abortion	8	13	69	1495	removal or loss of unborn child	
abortive	13	18	32	250	stopped too early	
abrasive [adj]	12	17	76	26	scratchy [material]	Sometimes seen in leaflets about asbestos in social housing. BNC also gives 22 occurrences of 'abrasives' [n].
abscess	8	13	71	99	swelling with pus	
absence	4	9	67	2344	being away	
absentee	6	11	77	230	person not present	
absolute	8	13	73	3387	complete	
absolutely	6	11	73	5672	completely	To politicians and media people, 'absolutely' has become the new 'yes', but as yet no public leaflet has used it in this odd way. Only a matter of time, though.
absorb	6	11	83	2180	take in	BNC includes figurative senses such as 'absorb information'.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
absorbent	6	11	69	44	able to soak up	
abstain	12	17	69	273	refrain from	Most BNC occurrences are 'abstain from'.
abundance	8	13	73	665	more than enough	
abuse [n]	6	11	82	3430	treat badly	BNC includes the figurative sense, eg 'abuse of power'.
abusive	8	13	68	278	insulting	
abut	16	21	62	83	touch end to end	
accede	16	21	57	138	allow, agree	
accelerate	6	11	70	1469	speed up	Looks like another multisyllabic terror, but harmless at grade 6.
accentuate	12	17	83	388	emphasize, stress, strengthen	
access [n]	10	15	74	8338	way of approach/entry	'If we cannot gain access to your property...' = 'If we cannot get in... .' Also common as a verb meaning 'to gain entry'.
accessible	10	15	87	779	easy to reach	BNC is for 'easy to gain/get/understand', which isn't in the LWV.
accommodation	8	13	76	4404	hotel room (LWV), home, place to live	
accompany	6	11	76	5378	go with	So it's a choice between a simple and widely seen polysyllabic word and the phrasal verb 'go with' that some people with English as a second language may not understand so well. If you're worried about your syllable count, perhaps in fear of a bad readability-test result, you'll pick the phrasal verb – wrong choice, according to the scores.
accomplish	6	11	92	1017	get done, do, finish, achieve	Ditto, though BNC suggests this is not as widely seen as 'accompany'.
accord [n]	10	15	76	451	agreement	BNC excludes 'of own accord'.
accord [v]	12	17	78	60	agree	
accord [v]	12	17	72	709	give	
in accordance with				2044	in line with	
accordingly	12	17	83	2286	so, for this reason, therefore	
account [n]	4	9	88	1665	facility to leave money in bank	
account [v]	6	11	78	2876	make a report	Some plain-language devotees always edit out 'take into account' and 'take account of' but this seems over zealous.
accountability	12	17	75	1209	being responsible	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
accountable	6	11	77	659	responsible, answerable	According to LWV, this is easier than 'accountability'. BNC suggests it is seen less often.
account for	8	13	71	2190	explain	
accredited	12	17	79	89	officially approved	
accrue	16	21	62	648	be added to, gather	This is a hard word, but hard to replace without loss of meaning.
accumulate	6	11	68	1464	pile up, build up	
accuracy	8	13	69	1687	exactness – correctness	
accurate	8	13	77	2887	right, correct	
accustom	4	9	71	56	get sb or sthg used to	
achieve	4	9	68	16736	gain by effort – get, reach	
acknowledge	10	15	68	4417	express thanks for, thank sb for	
acquaint (yourself with)	6	11	71	372	make familiar, find out about, read	'Please acquaint yourself with the details' is not obscure but pompous: 'please read...'
acquire	6	11	70	7091	gain or obtain – get	
acquisition	12	17	67	2616	getting for self, sthg bought or acquired	
acquit	10	15	79	377	free from a charge	
action [n]	12	17	80	2621	legal proceedings	Also common in business-speak as a verb, eg 'We will action your request.' Though this use is deplored by some as jargonistic, it seems a useful shorthand.
actuary	16	21	27	300	sb who assesses insurance risks	
acute	10	15	83	1318	severe and of short duration	Medical leaflets that speak of 'acute conditions' often fail to explain what 'acute' means in this context. Compare 'chronic'.
adapt	10	15	90	2826	make suitable	Not to be confused with 'adopt', ie to accept, take on or take up.
adaptation	8	13	82	622	changing to fit/suit	Should not be written as 'adaption', but often is.
additional	8	13	77	7335	extra, more	Not a hard word but why type it when, often, the plainer alternatives will do?
address	6	11	69	2589	apply oneself	Good alternatives to vogue phrases like 'address the issue' are 'tackle...', 'deal with...'
adduce	16	21	50	185	cite, put forward, offer as evidence	
adequate	10	15	94	3531	what is needed – acceptable, enough	
adhere	12	17	75	698	stick to, keep to	'You must adhere to the policy' = 'You must keep to/comply with the policy.'

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
ad hoc	16	21	75	501	for this case alone, occasional	Latin best avoided, but sometimes nothing else will do.
adjacent	10	15	75	1623	next to	
adjoins	8	13	84	245	is next to	
adjourn	6	11	83	758	postpone, break off to resume later	Easy word, not often seen.
adjudicator	16	21	55	162	sb who judges/assesses a dispute	
adjust	–	–	–	1602	alter, change	
adjustment	4	9	88	2109	change, alteration	Another supposed trisyllabic terror, but harmless.
administer	8	13	67	1143	manage, run	
administration	8	13	93	3830	management (as in administration costs/fee)	BNC excludes the government sense, eg the Obama administration.
admissible	8	13	68	242	can be permitted; allowed; acceptable	
adopt	–	–	–	6979	start (to use); take on/up	
adumbrate	16	21	23	35	hint, outline, foreshadow	Occasionally found in UK civil-service documents in the late C20. Rare. Best avoided.
advance [v]	6	11	78	2581	give beforehand	
in advance	–	–	–	1986	beforehand	BNC gives 595 occurrences of 'advance + noun', eg, 'advance warning/payment'.
advantageous	8	13	91	372	useful, helpful	Pompous. Instead, use 'will benefit you' etc.
adverse	12	13	70	1181	unfavourable	
advise	4	9	76	3732	give advice, give an opinion	
advise	4	9	68	1599	inform, tell, say	'Please advise us of your wishes.' A genteelism, still rampant in British business-speak. May cause confusion, too, with the main meaning of 'advise'.
advisement	16	21	83	1	consideration	
advocate [v]	12	17	81	1505	speak in favo(u)r of	As a noun, the promoter of a cause or sb who speaks for you. Also a Scots law term, roughly equivalent to barrister in England.
affirm	10	15	69	794	declare true	
affect	6	11	85	14020	influence	Often confused with 'effect' = to do or bring about. Authors uncertain about affect/effect often plump for 'impact on' as their verb for 'affect'. For them, the nouns 'impaction' (which does exist) and 'impactation' cannot be far behind.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
affirmative	10	15	67	243	favouring the question; yes	
affix	12	17	68	87	attach	
affluent	16	21	55	384	wealthy	
afford (an opportunity)	12	17	71	835	give	Pompous and best avoided.
afford (a purchase)	4	9	85	3968	able to pay fo	
afield	10	15	79	349	at a distance	'Further afield' may be difficult for non-native speakers: 'further away' is possible.
aforementioned	10	15	81	118	spoken of before [omit or specify]	Legalese. Even fustier than 'above-mentioned'.
aforesaid	13	18	75	130	named above [omit or specify]	Legalese.
agglomerate	12	17	35	2	mixture	
aggregate [n]	16	21	79	1700	total, sum	'Total aggregate amount' is sometimes seen in legal writing – horrible tautology.
aggregate [v]	–	–	–	142	combine, total, add	
aggregation	13	18	70	296	combined whole, total	
agreement	4	9	72	5418	contract ¹³	
ailment	6	13	80	269	illness	
albeit	16	21	54	1379	even if	
alcohol	6	11	76	2822	liquid drug	
alert	4	9	78	724	give warning to – warn, tell	
align	13	18	71	349	put in line, line up	
allegation	12	17	63	2110	unsupported claim	
allege	13	18	67	3615	declare, claim	
alleviate	12	17	79	550	ease, reduce, lessen	
allied	10	15	76	407	combined for a purpose	Linked, combined, alongside
allocate	13	18	80	2715	assign a share, divide up, share, give	'We use a points system to help us allocate houses to people on the waiting list.' Hard to see a clearer alternative to the word, and BNC suggests it is often seen.
allow for	6	11	83	2059	provide	Take into account, consider

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
alone	4	9	78	3211	only	
alter	8	13	76	3757	make different, change	
alteration	8	13	83	1518	a change	
alternate [v]	8	13	68	222	take turns	As an adjective, used in expressions like 'your bins will be emptied in alternate weeks' (ie, every other week). Often confused with 'alternative'.
alternative	12	17	81	10240	choice, other	
alternatively	0	0	0	1729	or	Often, 'or' will work well at the start of a sentence instead. Pedants may be horrified.
amalgamate	10	15	78	392	combine	
ambiguity	10	15	73	1061	vagueness, having more than one meaning	
ambiguous	12	17	78	827	lacking clearness	
ambit	16	21	58	183	the scope of an action	
ameliorate	16	21	53	129	improve, help, get better	
amend	8	13	75	1662	change	A simple word if LWV and BNC are considered together. Similarly, there's no need to replace the simple word 'alter' with 'change', especially in phrases like 'we will alter the charge' which would then become 'we will change the charge'.
amendment	6	11	71	2787	change	It's sometimes worth replacing this simple word if it will save a line of type.
amenities	–	–	–	510		Facilities
amidst	8	13	67	486	among	
ample	8	13	80	802	more than enough	Enough, plenty of
anaesthetic	10	15	78	375	(sth) causing numbness to pain	
analyse	6	11	67	3853	take part in thinking	Examine carefully
aneurysm	16	21	32	42	permanent artery swelling	
angina	16	21	42	115	Pain (usually chest or heart pain)	
annual	4	9	67	7917	yearly	Every year
annuity	13	18	77	240	regular income, pension	
annum	16	21	87	903	year	Local councils are keen on 'per annum' (p/a). Good alternatives are 'per year' (/yr) and 'a

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
						year'. Better to avoid all but the most common Latin, now that few people study the language. LWV lists 'annual' as a grade-4 word, yet competition stress once led to the following exchange during 'The Weakest Link': <i>Anne Robinson</i> "An annual event takes place how many times a year?" <i>Contestant</i> "Twelve."
anonymous	10	15	79	1124	without name	Nameless, with names removed.
antibiotic	10	15	80	736	disease-killing drug	
anticipate	10	15	79	2825	look forward to; take action in expectation	Widely misused as a posh word for 'expect'.
anticoagulant	12	17	79	20	(sth) keeping blood from clotting	
antidote	10	15	71	29	drug against poison	Not to be confused with 'anecdote'.
antihistamine	8	13	79	25	anti-allergy drug	
antisocial	8	13	70	242	against the public good	The hyphen in 'anti-social' is now wearing away.
apartment	4	9	96	1861	flat	
apparatus	10	15	72	776	equipment	
apparent	6	11	68	3234	easily seen, clear	
appeal [v]	8	13	81	6678	apply to higher court	
appearance	4	9	72	742	the way sb looks	
append	12	17	75	121	add to	
appendicitis	4	9	83	61	disease of appendix	
appertains	12	17	78	64	relates to	Rare and best avoided. 'Relates to' and 'about' may do.
appliance	4	9	68	660	household tool, equipment	
applicant	8	13	78	2572	job (etc) seeker, you	In official forms and leaflets, use 'you' wherever possible instead of this.
applicable	10	15	76	1413	suitable, relevant	A sentence will often read more smoothly if you can switch it around and use 'apply'.
application [a use]	8	13	79	992	use	
application [a form]	6	11	81	661	form	'Please make an application' endures. Prefer 'please apply'.
apply	6	11	70	4868	put to use, use	
appointment	4	9	78	1179	a set date	An easy word.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
apportion	12	17	73	178	divide among, split	
appreciable	13	18	64	235	noticeable, quite a lot of	
appreciate	8	13	78	13	increase in value	
advise	16	21	63	33	inform, tell	Often confused with 'appraise' = 'evaluate'.
appropriate [adj]	8	13	71	11201	suitable, proper, relevant	
approximately	6	11	68	2826	almost, about, roughly	Scientists, particularly, seem to have a horror of 'about', preferring to type a long word instead. But 'approximately' is just as imprecise, if that's their concern.
apropos of	16	21	70	11	referring to	
apt to	6	11	67	247	likely to	
aqueous humo(u)r	16	21	63	1	fluid in eye between lens and cornea	
arbitration	12	17	82	739	settlement by agreement	
architrave	12	17	57	40	a beam in architecture	Now, normally, a moulded door frame.
arm	6	11	73	339	branch or division – department, section	
arrears	16	21	68	588	amount unpaid	Instead of 'rent arrears', phrases like 'behind with your rent' are possible but 'in arrears' and 'rent arrears' are too useful and concise to give up. The LWV score looks far too high today.
arson	10	15	77	313	crime of causing fire (deliberately)	
arterial	10	15	67	213	about blood vessels	Also seen in 'arterial road', ie a main route to, from or around a town or city.
arteriosclerosis	8	13	73	12	hardening of the arteries	
as a rule	12	17	72	240	usually, normally	
asbestos	8	13	73	297	fireproof material	
aseptic	16	21	86	35	germ-free	
ascertain	8	13	71	867	find out	
aspect	–	–	–	10802	part (say) of a policy	
asphalt	8	13	75	95	paving material	Road- or path-surface material.
asphyxiation	10	15	80	20	suffocation	
aspirations	–	–	–	973	hopes, wants, ambitions'	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
assemble	6	11	74	1244	build, put together	
assemble	6	11	88	700	meet	
assault	6	11	68	3338	to attack a person	BNC includes n and v senses.
assert	12	17	77	1220	state strongly	
assets	10	15	78	4310	property, valuable things	
assign	6	11	73	335	give (by legal transfer)	
assignment	4	9	70	296	sth given (by legal transfer)	Odd that the LWV gives this as such a common word. Perhaps, though, the legal meaning is less well known than, say, the meaning 'project' or 'task', which is common in schoolwork.
assist	6	11	73	4311	help	
assistance	4	9	69	4305	help	
associate	6	11	70	7072	connect	
association	6	11	67	11482	group or organization	
asylum	8	13	68	921	place of shelter, safe place	
at first hand	12	17	67	131	directly	
atmosphere	6	11	83	1805	air	
at once	4	9	71	2435	right now, immediately	
attain	10	15	69	1248	reach, achieve, get	
attempt [v]	6	11	76	7926	try	The noun appears in BNC 10,941 times.
attend	4	9	83	9010	come to, go to, be present at	
attributable	13	18	68	584	owing to, due to, because of	
audible	8	13	70	324	able to be heard	
audit [v]	12	17	80	391	check accounts, standards, competence	
auditor	10	15	69	1757	sb who checks accounts etc	
augment	13	18	58	53	increase	
authentic	6	13	73	826	genuine	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
authoriz(s)ation	8	13	67	148	permission	
authoriz(s)e	10	15	79	2106	give power to, permit	
authority (right to comm'd)	6	11	70	8713	right, power	
authority (local gov't)	0	0	0	8091	council, local council	For brevity, 'local council' is preferable to 'local authority', and 'council' stands better on its own than 'authority'.
automatic	4	9	69	2153	working by itself	
avail [v]	12	17	68	150	make use of	As a relic of Raj-day commercialese (eg, 'avail yourself of the facilities') this is often used in India, where it is not regarded as pompous.
avenue	10	15	76	240	approach to a goal; method; way	
aver	16	21	36	16	declare positively, assert	The legal sense is to allege sth as a fact or declare it true.
avert	13	18	90	401	avoid	
aware (of)	6	11	71	10466	knowing	
axiomatic	12	17	48	89	self-evident	
B bacillus/bacilli	8	13	78	113*	bacterium/bacteria [*BNC split: 59/54]	May be better known in the US than the UK, where 'bacteria' is far more usual.
backdrop	–	–	–	175	scenery for a stage play etc	The figurative sense is not in the LWV, but is often used in report writing: 'set against the backdrop of the credit crunch...'
backer	8	13	80	252	a supporter	
backing	10	15	74	1074	help, support	
backlog	10	15	70	216	reserve supply	
backwater	10	15	75	11	stagnant water	Most BNC incidence is figurative, eg 'passions throbbled in the once-sleepy backwater'.
bacteria	6	11	75	1263	germs	BNC also gives 137 for 'bacterium'.
bail	6	11	81	618	money for release	
bailiff	16	21	48	190	assistant to a sheriff	BNC has only the modern sense of (eg) debt collector, not the agricultural foreman sense.
bail out	4	9	76	580	get out of jail	'Bail out' is used in BNC almost solely for senses other than LWV's. In the legal sense, 'bail' is used on its own in Brit E, eg 'he was bailed to the magistrates' court'. The BNC score is for this sense, regardless of whether 'bail' or 'bail out' is used.
balance sheet	10	15	75	967	report on finances	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
ballot [n]	6	13	79	67	used to vote	
balustrade	16	21	64	121	railing	
ban [n, v]	8	13	74	5649	law that prohibits	
banister	4	9	74	120	stair railing – see also balustrade	
banking	10	15	77	2171	money business	
bankrupt [v]	8	13	75	68	ruin financially	
bankruptcy	6	11	75	1097	insolvency	
barely	6	11	76	2184	only just	
barrier	6	11	70	2998	sth blocking the way	
barrister	16	21	83	801	type of lawyer	Little used in the US, so the UK figure given here (which is based on the LWV) is clearly far too high. In the UK, 'barrister' is better understood than 'counsel'.
bar [prep]	12	17	60	37	excepting	
bar chart	–	–	–	67	chart using bars	
bar graph	8	13	85	31	chart using bars	
bar to	6	11	67	49	block or barrier to	
basement	4	9	79	832	cellar	
basic	4	9	67	10651	fundamental, simple	
batten	12	17	28	186	strip of wood	
bay	16	21	63	412	compartment – as in 'parking bay'	
bay window	12	17	71	108	jutting window	
beam	6	11	69	514	thick piece of wood	
bed	4	9	79	373	where seeds are planted	
bedridden	6	11	68	49	too ill to be up	
bedsore	8	13	69	8	a sore from lying a long time in bed	
beforehand	4	9	68	668	ahead of time, before	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
begin	4	9	89	41397	start	
behavio(u)r	4	9	74	12768	conduct	
belated	8	13	71	179	late, delayed	
belongings	4	9	93	345	things owned	
benchmark [n, v]	–	–	–	300	(to act as a) standard or yardstick	
benefactor	10	15	87	261	sb who gives benefit (say to a cause)	
beneficial	10	15	68	1386	helpful, useful, doing good	
beneficiary	8	13	68	941	sb who receives benefit	
benefit [n]	6	11	79	12956	sth of help	The verb sense is less common but still easy: BNC 3728.
benign	12	17	54	203	not harmful	
bereavement	16	21	83	372	loss by death	
bestow	12	17	75	421	give, award	
beverage	4	9	69	227	drink	
beware	6	11	78	558	be careful	
biannual	8	13	77	24	twice a year	The inevitable confusion with 'biennial' makes 'twice a year' a safer bet.
biased	12	17	75	555	prejudiced	
bibliography	10	15	70	484	list of books	
bicameral	13	18	55	114	having 2 houses, eg such a parliament	
biennial	14	19	74	113	every 2 years	The inevitable confusion with 'biannual' makes 'every two years' a safer bet.
bilateral	12	17	77	774	two-sided	
bilingual	10	15	79	335	in two languages	
bill	8	13	83	2793	proposed law	
bimonthly	8	13	80	11	every two months	Also means twice a month in Brit. English, confusingly.
binding	–	–	–	243		The sense of (legally) 'restraining' or 'compelling', as in 'binding agreement' is often seen in housing documents.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
biocide	12	17	61	4	sth that kills living things	
biopsy	12	17	80	990	removal, examination of live tissue	
birth canal	8	13	68	9	passage through which sb is born	
birth control	8	13	78	254	limiting of births, contraception	
bisect	10	15	76	47	divide in two	As in council documents about town planning and roads 'bisecting' areas of land.
bisexual	10	15	80	75	attracted to, or having, both sexes	Perhaps a jump too far to confuse this with 'bisextile' (leap year), but be careful.
biweekly	8	13	70	3	twice a week	The meaning 'every two weeks' is also possible.
bitumen	13	18	38	71	tar-like mineral	
bituminous	12	17	71	39	of soft coal, of bitumen	
blackout	8	13	79	27	fainting	
bladder	6	11	78	293	body's urine container	
blameworthy	–	–	–	19		
blood relation	8	13	67	17	sb related by birth; relative	
board [n]	6	11	67	277	money for rooms and meals	
board [n]	10	15	72	10795	managing committee	
boarder	8	13	69	125	paying guest	
body	6	11	77	10893	organized group	
bolster	12	17	57	351	support	
bona fide	12	17	71	262	genuine/in good faith	LWV %: genuine = 73%, in good faith = 69%. So 71% is the average figure.
bonus	6	11	81	1763	something extra	
boost [v]	8	13	71	1605	to help sb or sthg advance, increase	
borough	12	17	42	2389	administrative area of, say, a city	
borrower	4	9	71	789	sb who takes sth on loan	
bound	10	15	72	2277	obliged, must	
bowels	6	11	68	203	intestines, guts [BNC singular, 'bowel' = 1252]	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
branch [n]	8	13	80	6015	subdivision – part, section, division	
breach [v]	0	0	0	4085	break [BNC includes noun senses]	'If you break the agreement' and 'If you break this condition' are sometimes seen in tenancy agreements and will do the job. But 'breach' is usually better than 'break' if you need a noun. And if you're going to use 'breach' as a noun, you may as well use it as a verb as well. The phrase 'If you are in breach of the agreement...' is a better statement of a current (ie, present-tense) position than 'If you have broken the agreement...', which could refer to any time in the past as well as the present.
breakdown	10	15	76	284	analysis	
brochure	10	15	75	1325	booklet	
bronchitis	6	11	67	167	throat or lung disease	
budget [n, v]	4	9	67	10173	plan for spending	
bulk	12	17	75	110	the greater part – most of	
bullying	–	–	–	83		
buoy	10	15	88	125	floating marker	
bursitis	12	17	80	2	inflammation	
butt	8	13	86	20	end – meet end to end	
by and large	12	17	67	485	as a rule – generally, usually, normally	
by(e)law	10	15	77	400	local rule or law	The usual spelling is 'byelaw'.
bypass	8	13	67	377	a way round – road passing round	
by virtue of	12	17	40	954	because (of)	
C cabinet	6	11	69	5950	main councillors or government ministers	
calculate	6	11	67	3593	figure out, work out, decide	Plain-English devotees often replace this with 'work out', but the word is well known.
calculation	8	13	82	1846	adding (etc) numbers	
calibrate	12	17	68	152	mark off measurement	
calorie	6	11	73	1095	food energy unit	Though a technical word, it's likely to be better understood than terms like 'dietary energy'.
camber [n]	13	18	32	28	arch or tilt (of a surface)	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
campaign [n, v]	6	11	67	12018	planned action	BNC includes the noun sense (9622).
cancellation	8	13	95	611	crossing out, deleting/deletion	
candidacy	6	11	67	158	running for office	The LWV score is surprising, but perhaps the word's well known in the US. BNC shows it to be rare in the UK. Compare BNC for 'candidate'. Weaker readers may be able to figure out the meaning based on their knowledge of 'candidate'.
candidate	6	11	79	7902	sb running for office, taking a test or exam	
capability	10	15	82	1826	fitness – ability, capacity	
capable	4	9	73	4824	able to do	
capacity	6	11	72	1973	amount sth holds	
capacity	8	13	69	1225	ability, talent	Documents from UK housing associations often speak of 'capacity building', meaning to build skills and abilities among local people. It always needs explaining, despite the low LWV score for 'capacity'. In other bodies, like the National Health Service, 'capacity building' may mean creating, eg, a team of researchers large enough to cope with a project. The meaning of 'capacity' sometimes seen in legal documents, 'legal competence', is little known.
capital	8	13	73	7770	money to invest, savings	It's always worth explaining the difference between 'income' and 'capital' for a mass audience. 'Savings' is likely to be clearer than 'capital'.
capitalize	12	17	73	481	make good use of	
capsule	4	9	75	386	small container	
carbohydrate	10	15	79	534	starch or sugar	
carbon monoxide	6	11	84	277	poisonous gas	
carcinoma	13	18	73	499	cancer	
cardiac	10	15	78	417	of the heart	
cardiovascular	10	15	73	236	of the heart and veins – or circulatory system	
carditis	16	21	70	0	inflammation of heart muscle	
caries	16	21	53	17	tooth decay	
carnivore	10	15	74	211	meat-eater	
cartilage	8	13	67	123	tough tissue	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
carry out	12	17	63	10860	finish the job, do	'Do' will often do. 'Carry out' is wordy though common, and may sometimes be misunderstood as 'transported away'.
cascade	–	–	–	19	pass on/channel through, eg, an organization)	
case [n]	8	13	87	2156	lawsuit	
case [n]	12	17	54	1200	a patient	
casement	12	17	70	81	hinged window opening	
casing	12	17	69	164	covering	
casual	8	13	84	1725	informal	
catalog(ue) [n]	8	13	80	2866	list	
category	8	13	80	6645	group, class	
catheter	13	18	49	165	urine tube	
cause [v]	4	9	74	18702	make happen	
causal	12	17	42	1154	producing an effect	Best avoided because of the inevitable confusion with the much more common 'casual'.
caution	6	11	73	1578	warning	
caveat	16	21	44	165	warning	
caveat emptor	16	21	49	0	let the buyer beware	
cavity	6	11	78	33	hole in tooth	
cease	8	13	77	2959	stop, end, finish	
ceiling	4	9	69	361	upper limit	
censure	12	17	70	80	express disapproval – disapprove of	
census	8	13	77	1192	count of people	
central	6	11	74	3886	main, principal	
centraliz(s)e	10	15	74	192	bring together	
certain	4	9	74	20711	particular	
certify	6	11	75	538	guarantee	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
cessation	16	21	68	242	stopping, ending	Often seen in legal documents, and best avoided. The BNC figure tells its own story.
challenge [n]	6	11	71	4177	demanding task	
challenge [v]	12	17	76	3281	question	
chamber	8	13	81	1057	government body	
champion [n, v]	12	17	52	394	defends a cause	BNC: n = 201, v = 193.
channel	4	9	78	530	path travelled – route, way, method	
character	16	21	52	1917	letter	The high BNC may reflect a bias in the corpus towards sources on linguistics.
characteristics	6	11	70	3745	features or traits	
characteriz(s)e	10	15	91	2571	describe special features	
charge	8	13	68	1455	to accuse	
chart	8	13	74	313	to plan – describe, map (eg progress)	
charter	10	15	69	1326	a group's statement of aims	BNC excludes historical charters.
check in/into	6	11	79	143	register	BNC's low score may reflect a bias in the corpus towards academic/journalistic writing.
check out	4	9	71	47	leave hotel	Ditto.
chiefly	6	11	75	717	mainly	
childbirth	4	9	67	357	having a baby	
childhood	4	9	82	2789	being young	
chiroprapist	13	18	52	41	foot doctor	
chiropractor	10	15	78	33	person who works on the spine	
chlorophyll	6	11	88	72	green pigment in plants	
cholesterol	8	13	68	739	fat in blood stream	
chronic (illness)	12	17	65	1519	lasting a long time	The difference between 'chronic' and 'acute' is often lost on patients.
chronological	10	15	70	327	in order of time	
circa	12	17	49	218	about	Use the English where possible, but the abbreviation 'c.' seems too good to lose as a shorthand in footnotes.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
circuit	8	13	83	2370	path of electric current	
circulate	8	13	67	716	give out, distribute	
circumstances	6	11	70	10244	facts about an event, state of affairs	
circumvent	13	18	94	219	find a way round, avoid, evade	
cistern	12	17	78	356	water tank	
cite	13	18	69	2416	mention specifically	
civil (law case)	6	11	70	720	non-criminal-law matter	
claimant	10	15	72	720	sb who claims	Also, in the English civil courts, this has replaced 'plaintiff'.
clause	8	13	81	4918	part of document (ie, not a clause in grammar)	'Paragraph' (LWV grade 4) is likely to be better understood by a mass audience.
clarify	6	11	76	1373	to explain clearly – make clear	
clarification	6	11	79	484	making clear, explanation	
class [n]	4	9	67	1175	kind or sort	BNC excludes social and educational class.
class [v]	–	–	–	377	to group; to consider or regard sth as	
classification	6	11	76	1912	arrangement in groups; grouping	
classified	10	15	79	947	arranged in classes – grouped	
cleanliness	6	11	81	294	being clean	
clement	16	21	92	15	mild	
client	10	15	84	10422	customer	
clientele	12	17	73	220	customers	
clinical	10	15	69	2749	for a sick room – 'to do with treating medical disorders'	
clitoris	16	21	71	84	female sex organ	
code	10	15	85	2858	set of rules	
codicil	16	21	30	48	addition to a will	
coexist	12	17	77	161	live together	
cognate	16	21	48	67	related	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
cognitive	13	18	52	1200	about knowledge or perception	
cognizance	16	21	90	20	knowledge, awareness	'We are cognizant of' is ornate. Prefer 'We know' or 'We are aware of'.
cohabit	13	18	65	63	live as man and wife	
cohesion	12	17	79	465	sticking together, working together	Not to be confused with 'coherent', meaning logical, easily followed, intelligible.
cohorts	13	18	68	38	partners	BNC for the usual sense in Brit E ('group of individuals with shared characteristics', as in 'the first cohort of students will start in March 2011') is 478. It's a rare word, in any case.
coincide	10	15	85	1610	occur at same time	
collaborate	10	15	75	560	work together	
collate	13	18	34	237	put together – gather, assemble, collect	
collateral	10	15	67	210	loan security to guarantee repayment	Little known in the UK, where this and 'security' need explaining for a mass audience.
collectively	12	17	70	537	taken as a group	
coma	6	11	68	264	deep unconsciousness	
combination	4	9	69	5342	things together – mix	
combine	4	9	75	6900	mix, join	
come about	8	13	67	892	happen	'Happen' avoids a phrasal verb.
commemorate	10	15	76	594	celebrate	
commence	10	15	76	1520	start, begin	
commencement	12	17	70	348	start, beginning	'Commencement date' is a favourite of lawyers. 'Start date' is now used in several Crown Estate business leases, with no ill effects.
commensurate	16	21	63	138	equal to	
commission	6	11	77	1400	put into service – appoint, employ, order	
common [adj]	6	11	72	18954	belonging to all	
commonly	6	11	74	2532	usually	
commonplace	8	13	87	548	ordinary – usual, normal	
communal	12	17	74	710	belonging to/used by all; for the public	
communicate	4	9	69	2761	talk, write, phone etc	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
communication	4	9	67	938	a message	
commute	8	13	69	136	travel to work	
commute	–	–	–	0	exchange for cash	The verb sense used in the pensions field. Phrases like 'trivial commutation' are difficult.
commuter	8	13	70	519	regular traveller	
compact	8	13	76	245	agreement	
comparable	8	13	71	1864	much alike – similar	
comparative	12	17	62	1379	relative	
compatible	12	17	78	1156	can exist together	
compel	10	15	73	1115	force	
compensate	12	17	68	1463	pay money to redress a wrong	
competent	12	17	72	1246	able	'Competency' is less likely to be understood than 'ability' or 'skill'. Bob The Builder's catchphrase was 'Can we fix it? Yes we can!' not 'Do we have the competency? Absolutely.'
compile	10	15	72	1386	make, collect, put together	Sometimes confused with 'comply'.
complainant	10	15	78	256	sb who complains	
complete	4	9	75	19669	finish, fill in	Plain-English devotees often scratch out 'complete' and use 'fill in' or 'fill out'. This is pointless as the word is common and the 2 senses shown are so similar in meaning. Of the BNC score, 521 are for the 'fill in' sense.
completion	6	11	72	2468	end, finishing	Also, in English law, when the sale of a property is concluded.
complex [adj]	8	13	76	6070	not simple – difficult	
compliance	12	17	83	1289	agreement; adherence to; observance of	For example, compliance with a code or terms.
complicated	6	11	75	2693	difficult	Much less frequent in BNC than 'complex'.
comply with	12	17	52	1708	keep to, abide by, obey	As the scores show, 'comply with' is not as well known as the professional classes may think. However, it is often the only verb for the job.
component	12	17	81	5494	part, section	BNC includes the concrete and abstract senses, eg 'car component' and 'part/section'.
compose	6	11	81	1207	make up	
compound	–	–	–	635	make worse	Sometimes used in more formal reports.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
comprehensive	13	18	82	3340	including much; covering everything	
comprise	10	15	68	3405	consist of, be composed of	
compulsory	12	17	81	1696	(you) must, required	
conceal	6	11	75	1909	hide	
concept	12	17	83	8985	idea	
concern [n]	6	11	75	8442	worry	
concerning	8	13	71	3353	about, on	
conclusion	6	11	74	7390	end, ending	
concur	12	17	42	253	agree	
condensation	12	17	76	301	change to liquid	A surprisingly high-level word.
condition (in a contract)	8	13	67	947	rule, requirement	
on condition that	8	13	81	180	if	
confinement	12	17	18	43	time just before childbirth	
confirm	8	13	67	5045	prove true; give confirmation of sth	A common misuse is to ask sb to 'confirm' sth that hasn't yet been mooted or has never been at issue. In such a case, just use 'tell' or 'inform'.
conflict [n, v]	8	13	79	8357	lack of agreement; disagree	
congregate	6	11	74	195	gather together	
connect	4	9	87	4915	join together – link	
consensus	12	17	80	1800	general agreement	
consent [n]	6	11	80	2947	permission, agreement	
consequence	8	13	81	7488	result	
consequently	8	13	77	2486	as a result; so	
conservative	8	13	75	623	careful, cautious	The BNC give far more occurrences for the political sense, with a capital or lower-case c.
considerable	8	13	70	9467	large	
consideration	13	18	37	433	amount paid, sth given in return	The word's legal use in phrases like 'In consideration whereof...' is odd to lay people. 'In return for...' will often do, though some lawyers will grumble.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
consolidate	12	17	82	1195	unite	As in 'consolidate debts', though only a handful of the BNC citations relate to finance.
constitute	12	17	77	4010	make up, form	
constituted	8	13	68	270	established	Now seen in housing documents, eg 'fully constituted residents groups', meaning they have a proper constitution.
constraint	12	17	68	1921	limiting force, limit, limitation	
construct	4	9	67	4311	build	
construe	16	21	68	730	interpret, infer	
consult	6	11	69	3182	seek advice or opinion	
consultation	8	13	73	3321	conference	There are also 192 BNC citations for 'in consultation'.
consumption	12	17	93	2786	amount used/eaten	
contemplate	12	17	93	1170	think carefully	
contemporary	8	13	79	4241	of the present time – modern, up to date	
contend	16	21	61	923	struggle	There are also 238 BNC citations for 'contend with'.
continually	4	9	77	1305	happening often but with breaks	
contingent	13	18	79	197	depending on	
continuously	6	11	90	881	without stopping, all the time	
continuum	–	–	–	415	without gaps	As in 'continuum of care'.
contract	4	9	71	14835	legal agreement	
contractor	6	11	77	1597	builder – tradesperson, worker	
contribution	6	11	83	8129	sth given/paid	
contributor	6	11	85	694	giver	
convalesce	16	21	93	53	get better, recover health	
convene	12	17	80	585	call together	
convenient	8	13	73	1974	easy to use/reach	
conveyancing	–	–	–	338	legally transferring a home's ownership	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
cooperate	6	11	91	1388	work together	
cooperation	6	11	88	1289	help	
coordinate [v]	12	17	75	402	to arrange into a system	
copious	16	21	68	184	plentiful	
correct [v]	4	9	81	1689	put right	
correlate	13	18	69	764	show relationship	
correlation	12	17	72	1746	close connection	
correspond	10	15	72	74	write, exchange letters	
correspondence	10	15	78	1369	letters – documents, paperwork	
corrode	12	17	88	131	eat away slowly; rust	
corroborate	16	21	52	109	confirm, support with evidence	Sometimes confused with 'collaborate' = 'work together'.
costly	6	11	72	1118	expensive	See also 'expensive', which is LWV 4. So both are easy words.
council	6	11	87	34684	lawmaking group or authority	
countersign	8	13	76	33	give an additional signature	
courteous	6	11	79	256	polite, well mannered	
covenant [n]	12	17	78	1508	legal promise	Often seen in legal documents; needs explanation for most lay people despite its high BNC.
credible	10	15	68	433	can be believed – believable	
credit (in bookkeeping)	10	15	90	5501	money paid in	'Creditors' is always worth explaining (eg, 'people you owe money to').
credit	6	11	78	4662	paying later – money borrowed, as in 'get credit'	
criteria	12	17	56	3921	standards of judgement	
criterion	13	18	80	1305	standard of judgement	
critical	8	13	77	2135	at an important point; essential, very important	As in 'It was a critical moment in the company's development.'
cross-examine	6	11	67	127	question carefully	
crucial	12	17	71	4403	decisive – vital, very important, essential	
culminate	16	21	76	833	reach high point; end	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
cultivate	6	11	87	665	improve with care; develop	
culpable	16	21	43	70	at fault, guilty, responsible for	
cumulative	12	17	82	703	added up, added together	
curb	8	13	67	644	hold back, reduce, lessen, control	
currently	8	13	74	7026	now [or use a present-tense v and omit]	So, eg, 'we are currently examining the problem' = 'we are examining the problem'.
curriculum	10	15	79	5572	course of study	BNC includes 'National Curriculum'.
curtail	12	17	81	475	shorten, reduce, limit	
custody	8	13	87	1465	keeping	
customary	8	13	75	810	usual, normal	
cyclical	12	17	83	190	keeps returning	Used in housing leaflets to describe regular ('cyclical') maintenance work.
D damages	6	11	87	2098	money for injuries	
data	8	13	71	22179	information	
dear	12	17	46	93	costly, expensive	
dearth	16	21	77	119	lack	
debatable	8	13	89	208	open to argument	
debilitate	12	17	55	192	weaken	
debility	16	21	63	35	weakness	
debit	6	11	77	227	money owed or taken to pay a debt	
debris	10	15	80	750	rubbish	
debt	6	11	77	1643	money owed	So 'outstanding debt' is usually tautologous.
debtor	6	11	68	1259	sb owing money	
deceased [adj]	8	13	68	283	dead [BNC n = 340]	As public documents on, say, bereavement, are reluctant to use 'dead' and 'death', terms like 'the deceased' and 'your loss' are common. There seems less of a taboo on 'die'. For a noun, the rare 'decedent' is sometimes seen in official documents.
decelerate	10	15	91	57	slow up, slow down	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
decent	8	13	73	1296	good enough, acceptable	
decentralize	10	15	76	339	spread out from centre	'Move away from the centre' is a more usual meaning now.
decision	4	9	73	3379	judgement or verdict reached	
declare	6	11	84	6308	make known, say, state	
decline	12	17	68	1621	refuse, say no	The noun 'declinature' is rare and best avoided except by lawyers talking to other lawyers.
decompose	13	18	77	208	rot	
décor	12	17	77	345	decorative scheme	
decorative	–	–	–	918	intended to look attractive	Few BNC citations for the sense in 'good decorative order' that's often seen in housing documents, but it's likely to be easy enough in the context.
decrease	6	11	86	1175	become less; reduce, fall, lessen	
decree	10	15	72	919	order	
dedicated	–	–	–	275	specifically created/set aside for the purpose	As in 'dedicated website/helpline'. Inevitably there's confusion between this meaning and 'conscientious'.
deduct	6	11	75	578	take away, subtract	Plain-English devotees often replace 'deduct' with 'take away', yet the word has a low LWV score. BNC suggests it's little used, though.
deduction	6	11	69	504	amount subtracted; sth deduced	
deeds	6	11	71	190	document showing ownership	
deem	16	21	84	1632	treat as, think, regard as	A legalism best avoided.
default	10	15	69	120	failure to fulfil obligation	In software guides and computer help screens, the meaning 'normal state of sth when no alternative is chosen' is common but may still cause difficulty.
defecate	16	21	71	58	move bowels, poo	Patients may misunderstand terms like 'pass a stool' and 'move your bowels'. Variations on a theme of poo, eg 'When you poo...' and 'poo sample' are likely to be clearer for some. Tayside Health Authority's well-intentioned leaflet 'Good Defaecation Dynamics' (2006) was derided by the media, its bizarre title assisting. The newspapers were soon bogged down in a pun-fest, with 'potty' a favourite and 'bum note' not far behind.
defect	10	15	85	1350	fault	
defective	10	15	86	743	faulty	
defendant	8	13	82	4884	person accused in law	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
defer	13	18	77	108	put off, delay	Not well known. Terms like 'deferred period' may therefore be harder than the insurance industry thinks, and will need explanation in the absence of any obvious alternative.
deficiency	10	15	86	1071	not enough of, lack, shortage, weakness	
definition	6	11	69	5012	meaning	
degree	10	15	79	6280	the amount or extent	
dehydrated	–	–	–	178	(of a person) needing fluids	
delegate [n]	6	11	82	1734	representative, attender, participant	
delete	12	17	54	1002	cross out, cross through, remove	
deleterious	16	21	47	118	harmful	
deliberate [adj]	6	11	75	1269	done on purpose	The verb, meaning 'consider carefully', is much rarer.
delineate	16	21	56	200	describe accurately, mark out, edge	A staple of planning and legal documents, but otherwise little known or seen.
deliver	4	9	93	5998	take to	Much used now to mean 'provide', 'achieve' or 'turn a plan into reality'. Thus the strange 'deliverables', meaning 'things that will be/have been provided'. Far posher, it seems, than plain old 'what we will do/achieve', 'actions', 'tasks' or 'services'.
demand	6	11	86	5666	ask for firmly, require	
demise (property law) [v]	0	0	0	154	convey by will/lease; transfer title/property	It's better not to use this in the rare sense (both as noun and verb) of 'death'.
demography	16	21	48	136	popul'n description, stat's of births, deaths	
demolish	6	11	79	1018	destroy	
demolition	8	13	78	571	tearing down	
demonstrate	4	9	67	6724	show, prove	
demonstrated [adj]	8	13	77	18	shown, proved	That this adjectival sense is little seen (BNC) shouldn't worry authors. The word is easy enough (LWV), as the previous entry shows.
demote	8	13	69	99	downgrade	Use of the term 'demoted tenancy', a sanction in England and Wales against people who break their tenancy agreements, may help to make this word more common.
denominated	–	–	–	61	as in 'denominated in euro'	
denomination	12	17	76	380	unit of value	Of BNC's 380 entries, 101 are for the currency sense and 279 for the church sense.
denote	10	15	72	855	show, indicate, stand for, represent	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
depart	10	15	81	289	change from original plan	
dependant	6	11	69	350	needing another's support	BNC includes about 120 citations for the 'dependent' misspelling.
dependent on	10	15	79	1901	controlled by something else	The more usual meaning is relying or depending on.
depict	13	18	77	1477	show, represent, picture	
deposit [n]	4	9	70	505	a downpayment	
depreciation	10	15	85	505	lessening in value	
designate	10	15	82	1593	name, specify, describe as	
desire	6	11	90	7914	wish, want [BNC inc. n and v senses]	
despatch	12	17	74	723	send, post	BNC shows that 'dispatch' is more common.
despite	10	15	84	14359	in spite of	Compare its BNC frequency with that of the lawyers' favourite, 'notwithstanding' (728).
detach	6	11	67	445	separate	
detail	8	13	85	517	explain item by item; list, set out, explain	
detect	6	11	76	3384	find out; uncover; discover (eg fraud)	
deteriorate	12	17	80	1079	grow worse, worsen	
determinant	12	17	69	627	important factor	
determine	8	13	72	9472	decide, work out, set	
determine [legal sense]	–	–	–	0	end, terminate	A lawyers' word, and likely to confuse non-lawyers. Its BNC score tells the story.
detract	8	13	93	309	take away from; lessen	
detriment	16	21	83	345	harm, damage	
detrimental	16	21	89	361	harmful, damaging	
detritus	16	21	19	129	debris, rubbish, litter, waste	
develop	6	11	83	19729	to bring into being	Also much used to mean 'produce', 'write', 'set out' or 'create' (eg a policy or procedure).
development	6	11	77	1920	area of new building or other work	Easy enough, but terms like 'developmental' lead to heavy writing.
devise	10	15	74	2245	think out, think of, create, work out	
diagnose	8	13	74	1022	find the cause	Some insist on 'cirrhosis was diagnosed' and not 'John was diagnosed with cirrhosis'. The

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
						former is perhaps more technically accurate but this battle, if such it was, has been lost.
diarrhoea	10	15	73	738	looseness of bowels, runny/frequent poo	
dictate	–	–	–	630	decide	As in 'circumstances have dictated our plans'.
differ	6	11	78	3203	be unlike	An easy word, so it's surprising that 'is different from' is often preferred.
difference	6	11	89	2939	disagreement	
difficulties	4	9	81	6769	troubles, problems	
digit	10	15	82	438	number below ten	
dilate	12	17	67	125	become enlarged, get larger	
diligent	10	15	74	139	hardworking, painstaking	
diminish	8	13	67	1800	lessen, reduce	BNC includes 'diminished responsibility'.
direct	8	13	78	2803	to show or guide	
disability	8	13	85	2183	loss of powers, physical incapacity	
disable	8	13	82	133	make useless, stop sth working	
disabled	–	–	–	2112	unable to act, lacking physical/mental ability	
disagree	4	9	67	1280	have a different opinion, differ	
disallow	10	15	83	196	refuse permission	
disassemble	6	11	75	30	take apart	
disburse	16	21	32	73	pay on sb's behalf	
disbursement	12	17	55	44	money paid on sb's behalf	Commonly used by lawyers, but rare elsewhere.
discernible	12	17	36	285	can be distinguished; clear, obvious	
discharge [v]	12	17	54	287	perform a duty	
disclose	10	15	78	1820	tell, show, make known, reveal	
disconnect	4	9	71	234	separate, cut off, unplug	
discontinue	6	11	71	268	stop, end	
discount	12	17	59	371	believe only part of	The other main meaning, 'reduce price' is clearly far more common.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
discrete	16	21	44	586	separate	Not to be confused with the more common 'discreet', meaning tactful or trustworthy.
discretion	10	15	77	1882	good judgement, freedom to decide	
discriminate	12	17	68	871	show preference to x over y	When referring to duties under anti-discrimination law, it may help to say, eg, 'we will not discriminate unlawfully [or unfairly] among applicants' because the very act of choosing one person over another is discriminatory on some grounds (eg, his or her skill set). Or, of course, you can state the grounds on which you won't discriminate, eg, age, sex, race, HIV status.
discrimination	12	17	77	1984	prejudice; preferring x over y	
discuss	4	9	70	14772	talk about	
disease	4	9	67	10683	illness	
disinfect	6	11	74	77	remove germs	
disinterested	10	15	79	172	no personal bias	Often confused with 'uninterested'.
display	6	11	92	3424	to show	
dispose of	6	11	84	1338	get rid of, remove	
dispute [n]	6	11	73	3965	an argument	
disqualify	4	9	79	467	declare unfit, bar from competition	
disregard [v]	6	11	69	626	pay no attention/heed to, ignore	
disrepair (state of)	12	17	76	64	in poor repair, out of order	
dissatisfied	4	9	71	450	be unhappy	
disseminate	16	21	84	367	spread or communicate widely	'Communicate', a fourth-grade word, will often do. Also try 'spread information' or 'distribute'.
distinct	8	13	71	3160	clear	
distribute	6	11	70	1567	spread around	
distribute	8	13	89	2271	give out	
district	6	11	69	9210	a certain section – area	
diverse	8	13	76	1311	unlike, different, varied	
diversity	10	15	76	1410	variety, difference among people	
dividend	8	13	67	2088	money earned on stock	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
division	6	11	86	3199	department	BNC figure excludes football and military divisions.
divorce [v]	6	11	86	692	separate [inc. the marriage sense]	
divulge	12	17	68	153	make known – reveal	
document [n]	6	11	72	8869	important paper	Now used for all sorts of papers, important or not.
documentary	–	–	–	124		The adjectival sense isn't in the LWV, but some people use 'documentary evidence' when 'written proof/evidence' will do the job
documentation	–	–	–	1201	papers, documents	'Documents' will often do, except when talking of the process of classifying or collecting sth.
domicile [n]	16	21	63	134	home	Has a technical meaning in nationality law, so 'home' won't always do.
dominant	10	15	89	3003	main, powerful	
donor	8	13	73	1063	giver	
dormer	12	17	30	69	part of roof; set or built into the roof	
dosimeter	12	17	48	4	radiation measure	
downspout	8	13	74	2	kind of rain drain	
drive	6	11	80	2513	push forward	As in 'drive through changes', 'drive prices up'.
driver	–	–	–	0	the figurative sense of 'sth that drives'	Only 10 BNC citations of the concrete sense 'a device that drives', such as computer drivers.
due course	8	13	67	708	proper time; soon	
duplicate [n]	6	11	82	74	copy	
durable	8	13	86	358	wears well	
duration	8	13	71	1832	length of time	
during	4	9	86	43533	while	'During' is a concise substitute for 'during the course of...'. Weather forecasters, take note.
dwelling	6	11	67	1282	home, house	Not a hard word but redolent of damp, old-fashioned homes with outside privies.
E earmark	12	17	53	389	reserve for special purpose	A good alternative to 'hypothecate'.
earnings	4	9	75	3202	pay for work	
easement	12	17	28	95	right to use land owned by another	
eaves	–	–	–	175	part of the roof that overhangs the walls	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
economical	8	13	70	495	cheap, good value, affordable	
economize	6	11	78	117	save money on	
effect [v]	10	15	71	1171	bring about, do	About half of the BNC uses are misspellings of 'affect'. The verbal meaning of 'effect' isn't well known, so is best avoided if clarity for a mass audience is the aim.
in effect	10	15	70	2002	actually	
effective	12	17	73	396	officially in force	
efficiency	8	13	75	3751	work without waste – as in 'efficiency savings'	BNC includes plural citations.
eg	0	0	0	1833	such as, for example	Latin. Better to use the English for a mass audience, unless space is tight (eg tables, lexicons).
egress	16	21	33	21	way out, exit	Only officialdom uses this term; best avoided.
elaborate [v]	10	15	78	603	give more details	
elapse	10	15	83	384	pass by; pass (ie of time)	
elect [v]	4	9	73	4021	decide	'Elect', as used in tax documents, can often be replaced by 'choose'. But if you then want to refer to 'election' (the act of electing), 'choice' or 'choosing' may not capture the full meaning.
election	4	9	85	15615	selection by vote	
electoral	8	13	78	2146	about voting	
electricity	4	9	87	3778	power to run electrical equipment	
element	6	11	78	10235	part of a thing	Often, 'part' or 'component' will do. But LWV and BNC show that 'element' is well known.
the elements	10	15	90	162	force of nature – weather	
eligible	10	15	79	1330	qualified, entitled, fit	
eligibility	10	15	69	334	fitness, entitlement to be chosen	
eliminate	6	11	67	2424	get rid of, remove	
elucidate	13	18	63	235	explain, make clear, clarify	
embark	12	17	82	1340	start or begin sth	Officialese and consultant-speak tend to favour verbose phrases like 'we embarked on/commenced/initiated an exercise/initiative/outreach programme in order to...'
embed	10	15	84	630	set in firmly	Part of 1990s newspeak in UK official writing, eg 'embedding a customer-care culture into all our internal processes, going forward'.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
embody	12	17	73	1212	form into a body, be expression of, represent	
embrace [v]	12	17	40	485	adopt	Common in 1990s newspeak, especially in those local authorities and housing associations where quasi-religious mantra were adopted, eg 'embracing change and celebrating diversity in all its myriad manifestations'.
emerge	12	17	61	1571	become known	
emergency	4	9	75	4220	sth needing urgent action	
emetic	16	21	40	26	causing vomiting	
emit	12	17	42	672	to give off; produce	BNC also has 1,450 citations for 'emissions' and 2 for 'emissivity'.
emolument	16	21	11	78	type of payment for work	
emphasiz(s)e	8	13	67	5002	stress, give special force to	
employment	6	11	67	10684	a job	An easy enough word, but often used when 'work' or 'job' will do.
empower	10	15	73	564	give power to	
enable	8	13	67	10158	allow, permit, make possible	
enact	10	15	75	323	make into law	
enclose	4	9	69	2118	put inside	
encompass	12	17	82	868	include	
encounter [v]	8	13	67	2391	meet	
encroach	12	17	42	218	go beyond agreed or normal limit	
encumbrance	12	17	26	5	mortgage or other charge on property	Legalese.
endeavo(u)r [v]	10	15	72	513	try	
endeavo(u)rs [n]	10	15	72	582	earnest attempt	As in the lawyers' technical term 'best endeavours'.
endorse	8	13	85	1629	approve of	
enforcement	12	17	85	1338	compelling compliance or obedience	
enfranchise	16	21	26	48	give vote or power to	
engage	–	–	–	269	involve, interest, work closely with	BNC figure is for this specific sense only. Total BNC figure for all senses of 'engage' is 4,716.
engagement	–	–	–	168	ditto – involvement, participation	BNC figure for all senses is 1,209.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
enhance	13	18	82	3983	increase	For example, 'enhance participation'. Often used to mean 'improve', eg services or benefits.
enquire	6	11	80	1446	ask	
enshrine	10	15	77	392	keep sacred	Now rare in its sense of 'make an essential part of' or, as 'enshrined', given an exalted status.
ensure	4	9	78	14054	make sure	Plain-English devotees tend to prefer 'make sure', for no good reason as the scores show.
enterprise	10	15	75	2641	undertaking	Not a difficult word, but 'scheme', 'business' or 'project' will often do.
entitle	8	13	82	5288	give a right to	
entrench	10	15	72	420	establish strong position	
envisage	13	18	60	1843	have in mind, expect, imagine	
equal to	4	9	87	1265	the same	'Equal' often does the job.
equipment	4	9	74	8843	gear, hardware, supplies	
equitable	–	–	–	588	fair	
equity	13	18	63	1967	buyer's share	'Share' is far more common.
equities	–	–	–	265	company shares	Except when writing for savvy investors, this needs explanation the first time it appears.
equivalent	8	13	78	4415	equal in value, amount or importance	
erection	10	15	70	29	building	
erroneous	12	17	83	234	wrong, mistaken	
escalate	10	15	76	514	increase or develop rapidly	In business-speak it's also used to mean 'pass to a higher authority for action'. This will sound strange to many people, so the context needs to make it clear.
especially	6	11	72	17365	particularly, chiefly	
establish	6	11	68	15557	set up, form	
establish	10	15	67	3889	prove beyond doubt	
evaluate	8	13	75	2442	test, assess, find the worth	
in any event	12	17	52	684	anyway	Also possible is 'whatever happens'.
in the event of	–	–	–	824	if	Unusual. BNC for 'event' is 10,307. Sample of 50 gives 4 for 'in the event of'. So the % is 824.
in the event that	–	–	–	412	if	See 'in the event of' for similar calculation.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
eventually	8	13	68	8860	in the end	
evince	16	21	59	96	show signs of, make evident	
evolve	12	17	59	2206	develop slowly	
exaggerate	4	9	67	693	make sth seem larger or greater	
exceed	8	13	80	3046	go beyond, be more than	
excepting	13	18	80	31	not including	Pompous and legalistic form of 'except'.
exceptional	6	11	78	1727	unusual, unusually good	
excess	8	13	82	2810	too big a supply	Only about 5% of BNC is for the part of an insurance claim that the policyholder has to pay.
excessive	8	13	74	1728	too many, too much	
(in) excess of	–	–	–	835	more than	
exclude	8	13	75	5219	leave out, shut out	
exclusion	10	15	89	1466	shutting out	Probably less easily understood than the verb form 'exclude'. Often seen (in the UK) in vogue expressions like 'social exclusion' and 'financial exclusion'.
exclusive	8	13	67	2069	open to a few only	
excrement	16	21	77	102	animal waste	In leaflets about fouling by dogs, 'dog mess' and 'dog poo' are options.
excreta	–	–	–	40	poo	So this alternative to 'excrement' is rare.
excursion	8	13	80	800	short trip	
exemplary	13	18	80	248	being a good example, worth imitating	
exempt	10	15	68	1015	free of/from	
exhaust	6	11	69	370	use up	'When you have exhausted our complaints procedure...' is probably less clear than 'When you have gone through all the stages of our complaints procedure'. As BNC shows, 'exhausted' is rare in this sense.
exhaustive	16	21	28	328	complete	As in 'this list is not meant to be exhaustive'. Rare, as BNC shows.
expand	6	11	84	5363	spread out or increase	As in 'expand our building programme'.
ex parte	13	18	43	508	without ref to other side, without notice	A Latin expression now banned from the English civil courts, 'without notice' being preferred.
expedite	12	17	75	88	help along, speed up	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
expeditious	13	18	45	28	done quickly and efficiently	
expenditure	8	13	70	5706	spending	
expense	4	9	67	4674	cost or spending	
expertise	12	17	71	2607	having special knowledge	
expiration	13	18	78	78	end, ending	Legalese.
expire	6	11	67	718	end, run out	
explain	4	9	93	18701	make clear	Plain-English devotees tend to replace this word, for no good reason as the scores show.
explicit	12	17	86	1873	clear and full	
expose	6	11	70	3765	uncover	As in 'exposing' the flooring/tiles/boards.
express	12	17	60	227	clear and definite, specific	Rare, in this meaning.
extant	16	21	49	231	current, in force, still exists	Rare.
exterior	6	11	67	708	outside	
extremity	10	15	77	227	limit, farthest part, edge	
F f(a)eces	16	21	79	319	body waste, excrement, poo	See also 'defecation', 'excrement', 'excreta'.
fauna	16	21	43	451	animal life	
fabricate	12	17	71	163	make, make up, forge	
facilitate	12	17	40	1771	help, make possible, enable, make easy	A staple of writing to impress, as in this notice intended for people visiting a school: 'In the event of an emergency evacuation of these premises should you require assistance to facilitate your evacuation would you please advise your host or reception on arrival.'
facilities	10	15	67	7506	equipment/resources for doing things	
facsimile	10	15	73	279	an exact copy	Simpler to use 'fax' when referring to the machine.
factor	12	17	70	14829	reason, cause	
factor in [v]	–	–	–	6	take into account/consideration, consider, include	
familiar [adj]	6	11	78	5579	well known	
familiarize	8	13	77	169	get to know	
fatal	6	11	76	1350	causing death	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
fatality	10	15	79	194	accidental death	
fatigue	8	13	70	474	tiredness	
favo(u)rable	8	13	71	14566	helpful	
feasible	12	17	81	824	possible, practically possible	
feature	8	13	62	15004	something noticeable about a thing	'Part' will often do.
features	8	13	70	7515	traits, characteristics	
field	8	13	86	4274	range of activity	As in 'in the field of' and 'in this/her field'.
figure	6	11	84	10212	number	
figure	13	18	79	1108	to be prominent	
finaliz(s)e	–	–	–	560	end, finish, complete	
finance [v]	6	11	78	2305	to provide with money	'Pay for' will often do.
financial	6	11	87	16,559	to do with money	Instead of euphemisms like 'financial difficulties', consider using 'debts' and 'money trouble'.
findings	8	13	87	3276	results	
finial	16	21	26	44	ornamental top piece	If explaining, use 'decorative top' or 'decorative end'; an illustration will help.
fiscal	10	15	67	1321	about money/taxation; financial	
fissure	13	18	69	187	deep crack	
fittings	12	17	74	778	things fitted, say in a house	
fixture	6	11	68	204	something that stays in place	
flag [v]	4	9	81	52	signal	
flagship	–	–	–	252		Or use prominent, significant, important, leading, top.
flake [v]	4	9	68	162	chip or come off in pieces	
flammable	6	11	68	75	will burn	Equivalent in meaning to 'inflammable', to the puzzlement of new learners of English. 'Flammable' and 'non-flammable' are the safe words to use.
flash flood	10	15	84	21	sudden violent flood	
flashing	12	17	43	4	watertight metal trimming	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
flat rate	10	15	63	112	an unchanging sum	
flaw	8	13	76	524	imperfection	
flex [n]	–	–	–	113	'electrical cable'	BNC also gives 301 citations for the verb 'to flex'.
flexible	6	11	81	2379	adapts easily	The sense 'open to change' is also commonly seen.
flora	10	15	71	954	plant life	
flourish	8	13	70	1183	thrive	Seen in phrases like 'where business can flourish'.
fluctuate	12	17	70	472	change continually	Documents about investments often use this word, eg 'Their value may fluctuate.' It's hard to see a clearer alternative. Sometimes '...may rise and fall' will do.
flue	12	17	72	226	pipe carrying smoke	
fluid	6	11	79	1502	liquid	
focus	4	9	76	984	adjust the eyes, concentrate on, centre on	
f(o)etal	12	17	41	461	refers to unborn young	
f(o)etus	16	21	51	437	unborn young	
foliage	12	17	77	706	leaves	
follow suit	10	15	74	310	to follow the example	Or use 'to do the same', as 'follow suit' is opaque to non-native speakers.
font	13	18	66	636	a set of type	
footprint	4	9	79	354	mark made by foot	BNC has no citations for 'carbon footprint'.
forbid	4	9	68	1322	ban, disallow	
in force	12	17	56	778	in use, operating	
foreclose	12	17	73	50	take over property	Used when, say, a long-term debt goes unpaid.
forefront	12	17	75	493	position far ahead	For example, 'This is at the forefront of our plans.'
for(e)go	13	18	88	98	do without	Better spelt 'forgo' to avoid confusion with the archaic 'forego', to precede.
forename	8	13	92	28	first name	
forfeit	6	11	68	279	to give up as a penalty	
formerly	8	13	82	1980	before	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
formulate	8	13	68	1562	form, plan, devise, put in logical form	
forthcoming	8	13	80	1583	approaching, coming	
forthwith	16	21	77	251	now, at once, immediately	Lawyers tend to use this, but it's vague. If you want sth done 'forthwith', give a deadline.
fortuitous	16	21	51	121	happening by chance, lucky	
forum	10	15	81	1904	public discussion	
forward [v]	4	9	82	238	send on, pass on	
foster	10	15	74	807	help grow	
foundation	6	11	80	803	basis	
fracture [v]	4	9	68	146	break	
frail	8	13	78	552	weak, feeble	
framework	10	15	75	3258	main outline, basic structure	
fraudulent	8	13	75	262	dishonest	
freehold	12	17	35	305	land held indefinitely	
freeholder	13	18	56	184	property owner	
frequently	4	9	67	5712	often	
friction	12	17	76	126	disagreement	
frontage	10	15	78	230	land toward front	
frugal	16	21	80	79	not wasteful (careful with spending)	
fruition	16	21	78	179	desired outcome	As in 'come to fruition', a high-register way of saying 'happen'.
fulfil(l)	8	13	87	2370	meet, satisfy, carry out, finish	
function	6	11	76	362	work	
function	10	15	79	1999	purpose	
fund [v]	–	–	–	1750	pay for	
fundamental	8	13	88	4480	basic	
funds	6	11	82	6174	sum of money	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
furnish	8	13	67	76	give	Though LWV shows this is well known, an expression like 'please furnish particulars' is simpler as 'please give details'.
further	6	11	76	22195	more, additional, extra	
furthermore	6	11	72	2883	also; what is more	
G gain (access to) [v]	6	11	74	398	get into [BNC includes 'gain entry']	
gain [v]	6	11	74	8409	get	'Gain a qualification' is fairly common.
gateway	–	–	–	741		Figurative and somewhat clichéd phrases like 'Birmingham is the gateway to the north' are common – BNC includes 290 of them.
gather	4	9	86	2016	pick and collect	As in 'gather evidence'.
gauge [v]	10	15	73	318	estimate, assess, measure	
gender	10	15	68	1990	tells sex	Though purists claim this word for grammar only, it's widely used to mean sb's sex.
generally	6	11	85	11457	usually	
generate	6	11	74	5959	produce, make, give, cause	
generic	13	18	67	609	general, across the board, common	BNC shows this to be rare.
genitals	12	17	67	119	sex organs	
germ	4	9	73	107	cause of disease, bacterium	
gestation	13	18	44	214	pregnancy period	
get	4	9	83	17096	receive	Instead of 'if you are in receipt of a pension', just say 'if you are getting a pension'.
get	4	9	69	34193	obtain	As long as 'get' isn't overused, it's pleasantly informal. Had Irving Berlin called his show 'Annie Obtain Your Gun' he might have delighted a few English teachers whose pupils overuse 'get', but missed the target with the public.
ghetto	10	15	75	312	a segregated area	Now used to refer to areas in need of regeneration.
give	4	9	90	15438	hand over, provide	
glaucoma	10	15	67	29	eye disease	
glazing	13	18	80	327	coating with glass, glass, inserting windows	
global	8	13	90	3534	worldwide	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
glossary	6	11	91	188	a list of defined words	'Meaning of words' is now often used as a heading in terms and conditions.
govern	12	17	73	1407	determine	
governance	12	17	63	179	control	Overused in council-speak to mean 'management'. The word seems pompous and donnish, too. British prime minister Harold Wilson used it in his book title 'The Governance of Britain' (1976). A British government Green Paper of 2007 bears the same name.
grant	6	11	67	6533	give, allow	
grievance	8	13	72	664	cause for unhappiness or complaint	
ground	0	0	0	1581	reason, cause	BNC also has 'grounds', 4618
gross	10	15	76	1282	entire amount or amount before deductions	
guarantee [n]	6	11	79	1560	promise	
guarantor	12	17	62	226	sb who guarantees	
guidance	6	11	76	3198	sth that shows the way; help; advice	
H habeas corpus	10	15	74	49	court order req'g sb to be brought to court	Latin: 'you must have the body'.
habitable	12	17	71	85	can be lived in	
habitation	8	13	75	59	home, where sb lives	As old-fashioned as 'dwelling'.
h(a)emorrhage	12	17	79	383	bleeding	
hard and fast	10	15	70	96	strict	Or use 'fixed', 'set' or 'definite'.
harness [v]	8	13	75	439	put into use	
hazard	6	11	69	1459	danger	Compare 'risk', which technically is the likelihood that sth will happen.
hazardous	6	11	69	714	dangerous	
headway	10	15	77	128	forward movement	As in 'make headway'. Or use 'progress'.
hedge [v]	12	17	25	267	to make an opposite bet, trying to reduce risk	
hedge fund	–	–	–	1	a pool of money invested	The fund is often aggressively managed and aims to generate high returns, ideally while minimizing risks.
heed	8	13	73	428	pay attention	
hence	8	13	74	4637	therefore	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
hence	10	15	67	47	from now	
henceforth	6	11	72	333	from now on	Unusual word in the UK, as BNC shows.
herald [n]	10	15	73	437	makes announcements	
herald [v]	–	–	–	377	mark, signal	Unusual but sometimes used to puff, eg, 'The wheeled bin heralds a box-fresh and rosy-fingered dawn in refuse collection.'
hereafter	6	11	88	117	after this	
hereby	16	21	69	258	by this means [or omit]	Liked by lawyers for its claimed 'performative' role in phrases like 'I hereby declare...', but many legal documents manage without it. An alternative is 'By signing this, I say that...'
herein	10	15	73	100	in this [be specific or omit]	Legalese.
hereinafter	12	17	81	79	afterwards [or omit]	Legalese. 'Viking Dawn (hereinafter called the "ship")' becomes Viking Dawn ' (the "ship")'.
hereof	12	17	26	35	of this [be specific or omit]	Legalese.
hereon	12	17	19	3	on this [be specific or omit]	BNC shows the rarity of this and other legalistic 'here-' words.
hereto	–	–	–	67	to this [be specific or omit]	Legalese.
heretofore	8	13	67	16	until now, up to now [or omit]	Legalese.
hereunder	8	13	67	45	below, under this [be specific or omit]	Legalese.
hereunto	12	17	13	3	to this [be specific or omit]	Legalese.
herewith	12	17	67	35	with this [or omit]	'I enclose herewith' is still seen occasionally; omit 'herewith'.
hernia	10	15	77	224	intestine piercing body wall	Which the ancient Romans found hugely funny, apparently, especially in foreigners.
hesitate	8	13	71	2036	pause due to being undecided/unsure	Wordy letter-ending formulas like 'if you require further information please do not hesitate to contact me' are better replaced by, eg, 'if you need more details, please contact me'.
heterosexual	12	17	52	377	prefers the opposite sex	'Straight' is possible if the context makes the meaning clear.
hierarchy	12	17	59	1966	order of classes by rank	
highlight [v]	8	13	77	2649	put emphasis on	
highway	4	9	81	1410	main road	
historically	–	–	–	795	in the past	By using 'in the past' or 'used to', it's often possible to omit 'historically'.
hitherto	12	17	72	1549	until now	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
holistic	–	–	–	255	considering a person (or family) as a whole	
homogeneous	13	18	84	489	of the same kind	
homosexual	8	13	72	821	prefers the same sex	'Gay' is possible if the context makes the meaning clear.
however	8	13	68	20308	nevertheless	eg, 'He is guilty of the offence. We must, however, regard this as a special case.'
however	6	11	68	43006	but	eg, 'He is guilty of the offence. But we must regard this as a special case.' Another meaning, eg 'However clever he was, he still failed his driving test' is much less common. The wordier 'no matter how' or 'regardless of how' seem to be preferred by most users.
howsoever	12	17	69	27	in whatever way	
humidifier	6	11	67	14	machine to moisten air	
hustings	16	21	81	46	platform for political speeches	
hypertension	13	18	70	369	abnormally high blood pressure	Not to be confused with 'hypotension', abnormally low blood pressure.
hypodermic	6	13	88	39	skin injection	Omit (when adjectival) or use 'injection' or 'needle' (when a noun).
hypothesize	–	–	–	8	earmark, assign for a stated purpose	A rarity used by bureaucrats and politicians. Compare the scores for 'earmark'.
hypothermia	13	18	61	91	reduced body temperature	
identify	6	11	81	9208	describe correctly	'Find' and 'locate' are often possible if an alternative is needed.
identity	6	11	81	4264	who you are	
ie	12	17	63	6014	that is, namely [BNC inc 'ie']	Latin: 'that is'. Prefer the English if space is unlimited.
if	4	9	70	187722	on condition that	A much more frequent start for conditional sentences than 'in the event of' or 'should'.
if need be	4	9	71	118	if necessary	May be opaque for non-native speakers.
ignite	6	11	67	262	set on fire, light	
illegible	12	17	31	70	not readable	
illicit	16	21	65	261	not lawful	
illuminate	8	13	74	427	light up	
illustrate	4	9	68	4420	give examples, show, explain	
illustration	–	–	–	656	an example of	It's usually easy to avoid this long-winded figurative sense.
immaterial	8	13	69	194	unimportant, insignificant	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
immediately	6	11	76	10145	at once, now	A common and easy word. Devotees of readability testing will quail at its 5 syllables.
imminent	16	21	50	796	about to happen	Not to be confused with the rare 'immanent', meaning all-pervasive.
immunize	8	13	68	104	make safe from, make immune	
impact [n]	–	–	–	7741	effect, outcome, result	The verb 'to impact' is now widespread but 'to affect' is available and should be first choice.
impede	13	18	79	366	get in the way of	Also possible is 'hinder', though its LWV scores are similar.
imperative	12	17	79	261	vitality necessary	Also possible are 'very important', 'important' and 'vital'.
impetus	12	17	39	647	stimulus	Also possible are 'motive', 'reason', 'driving force' and 'spur'.
implant [n]	–	–	–	190	sth inserted or fixed in sth else, eg the body	
implement [n]	8	13	68	181	tool	
implement [v]	12	17	49	4097	put into effect	Also possible 'start', 'make happen', 'bring or put into operation/action/force'.
improvement	4	9	67	6573	change for the better	
inaccessible	12	17	77	338	hard to reach	Can be explained as 'difficult to get/take advantage of/benefit from/read'.
inaccurate	6	11	69	458	incorrect	
inadequate	8	13	67	2283	not enough	
inadvisable	12	17	74	47	unwise, thought a bad idea	
inasmuch as	12	17	53	107	because	
inappropriate	8	13	75	1237	unsuitable	
incapacity	12	17	51	149	lack of ability	
incentive	12	17	87	2313	encouragement, bonus	Instead of 'to incentivise', 'to encourage/reward/give an incentive' are possible.
inception	16	21	56	289	start, beginning	
incidence	12	17	86	1717	rate of occurrence	
inclement	12	17	69	33	severe or harsh (weather)	
inclusion	10	15	71	1215	adding into, act of including	
inclusive	10	15	67	415	including	To include everyone (of a policy/strategy/scheme).
incontinent	12	17	26	124	unable to control body functions	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
incorporate	8	13	76	4144	combine into one, include	
increase [v]	6	11	78	22450	become more, rise	Easily understood, and for non-native speakers preferable to 'go up'.
increment	16	21	68	221	increase	
incur	12	17	81	1741	bring on oneself, suffer	A fairly difficult word that's hard to avoid using in, eg, financial documents.
indebted	6	11	75	60	owing money	
indemnify	13	18	61	156	pay for loss, fully protect against loss	The UK's Office of Fair Trading seems to take a dim view of this word when it reviews standard-form contracts that consumers claim are unclear. BNC shows it to be a rarity. If it has to be used, the explanation 'fully protect against loss' may help.
index [n]	12	17	53	3530	measure/scale showing relative position	
indicate	6	11	77	12276	suggest, show, signal	
indicator	10	15	74	1596	pointing device	Sometimes 'is an indicator of' is used where the verb 'indicate' would be crisper.
indict	12	17	84	180	charge with offence	
indictment	8	13	72	400	formal accusation	
individual	6	11	70	11393	one person or unit	'Person' will usually do, and is simpler (grade 4, BNC 28,614).
induce	10	15	85	336	persuade	
induction	10	15	74	193	taking into an army/business/job etc	Also used to mean 'introductory training'.
inefficiencies	–	–	–	64		Sometimes 'waste' will do.
inequity	16	21	69	67	lack of fairness	
infer	12	17	46	739	deduce, conclude	Not well understood and often confused with 'imply'.
inflammation	8	13	73	468	heated red swelling	
infirm	16	21	64	125	weak (physically weak or ill)	The BNC score includes 'the infirm'.
inform	6	11	86	5345	tell, let sb know	
inform	–	–	–	572	permeate, contribute to	Based on the BNC score, statements in consultation documents like 'your views will inform the development of our strategic vision' may be strange to many. Try '...help us prepare our strategy/plan/policy' or '...contribute to our development of the strategy/plan/policy'.
infringe	16	21	89	330	break rule	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
ingest	13	18	87	181	take into system, eat, absorb	
ingress	13	18	23	35	entrance, way in	Official documents sometimes speak of an 'ingress of water'. Prefer some variation on 'entry of water' or 'water entered the property'.
inhale	6	11	74	306	breathe in	
initially	12	17	77	3801	at first	
initiate	10	15	76	2192	do first, start, begin	
injunction	12	17	93	1034	a court order to stop sb doing sth	Also possible is 'stop order'.
innovation	16	21	72	2419	sth new	
insanitary	8	13	74	47	unhygienic	
insert	6	11	76	1549	place between, put in	
insofar as	12	17	65	278	to the extent that	
insolvent	13	18	60	221	can't pay debts	
inasmuch	12	17	63	0	to such an extent	Not seen at all in the BNC, which is surprising. It's archaic, however, and a bit pompous.
instalment	6	11	73	635	partial payment	Payment in regular (usually monthly) amounts.
instance	12	17	65	7277	example	
instance	10	15	75	1498	stage in action, eg 'in the first instance'	
instant	10	15	69	8	the present month	Now seen only in the letters of old-fashioned lawyers.
institution	6	11	72	11320	organization, body	
instrument	12	17	66	654	formal legal document	
insufficient	8	13	74	1332	not enough	
insulation	6	13	76	592	barrier to prevent heat loss	BNC is very low. Hence, perhaps, the need for a global warning about global warming.
insurable	12	17	57	9	can get insurance	In Brit E, more usually used of things or medical conditions – 'can be insured against'.
insurance	4	9	67	647	protection against loss	
integral	13	18	70	1216	necessary part, vital	'Built in' is also possible, eg an 'integral dishwasher' is built in to the cupboard.
intend	6	11	74	11260	mean, will, plan	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
intention	6	11	74	6156	purpose	
inter [v]	16	21	48	637	put in earth, bury	
inter alia	16	21	45	311	among other things	Latin seen in legal documents occasionally.
inter alios	–	–	–	7	among other people	Latin seen in legal documents even less than its sibling.
intercept [v]	8	13	73	536	stop, get in the way of	
interchange [n]	8	13	76	79	link between modes of transport	For example, a bus–rail station. An unusual word but easy enough.
intercom	6	11	70	104	two-way phone	Unusual but easy.
interest	6	11	76	8448	payment for use of money	
interim	13	18	85	1908	time in between – in the meantime, meanwhile	
interior [n]	6	11	75	3512	inside [inc. 'interiors']	
intermediary	10	15	79	592	go-between	
interment	16	21	51	36	burial	A staple of funeral announcements, eg 'Interment at xx cemetery', but an unusual word.
internal	8	13	71	6667	inside	
interpret	8	13	81	4285	explain	
intersect	8	13	71	189	cross each other	
intersex	–	–	–	4	intermediate between male and female	
interval	8	13	70	2999	time between, break	
intervene	8	13	67	2066	come between (events or sides)	
intervention	10	15	68	3596	coming between	
intervention	–	–	–	677	a social care service or medical treatment	
intestate	16	21	68	71	doesn't leave a will	
intimate [v]	16	21	76	180	say, hint	
intoxicate	6	11	68	157	make drunk, use drugs to poison	
intravenous	12	17	83	367	into a vein	
introduce	6	11	71	11754	bring into use	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
invalid [n]	8	13	76	133	sick or disabled person	Like 'handicapped', seen by many as derogatory and therefore not used in British public-information documents when 'disabled' is a feasible alternative. The adjectival form 'invalid', eg 'your passport is invalid' is in common use.
invalidate	12	17	75	220	make void or worthless	
invalidity	–	–	–	155	state of being an invalid or disabled	
inventory	10	15	74	693	a listing of property	Usually a list of items, eg furniture in rented accommodation.
investigate	6	11	76	5542	look into, examine	
investment	6	11	88	7389	money used to make more money	
invoice [n]	10	15	76	725	bill	
irrespective of	13	18	81	847	regardless of	
irrigate	8	13	75	92	water, rinse or flood with water	
irrigation	6	11	78	281	channelling of water to crops etc	
isolate	8	13	79	3511	place apart, cut off, separate	
issuance	12	17	45	105	issue	
issue [v]	6	11	69	7702	give, send out	
issue [n]	12	17	15	0	children	Often seen in British wills, sometimes to the confusion of the will-maker who doesn't realize that his or her 'issue' are children. Another noun sense, 'problem' or 'matter for discussion', is a common and often imprecise term. 'He's got mental-health issues' is often preferred by people who feel it's more sensitive than using 'problems' or 'difficulties' or saying 'He has a mental illness.'
itemize	8	13	75	117	give details – list	
iterate	12	17	64	53	state or speak	
iteration	–	–	–	206	stating repeatedly	
iterative	–	–	–	58	step by step	
J jamb	13	18	63	39	part of door frame	
jargon	12	17	59	519	trade language	
jeopardiz(e)	6	11	73	449	endanger, risk, threaten	A low LWV score and a low BNC score, so it's seemingly well known but little used.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
jeopardy	10	15	82	339	danger	
joined-up	–	–	–	0		As in 'joined-up government/thinking/decision-making'. Try 'co-ordinated'.
judgement	6	11	74	1898	decision	Lawyers tend to spell court decisions as 'judgment'; would that they were always so concise.
judicial	6	11	71	2443	relating to justice/the legal system	
jurisdiction	10	15	69	2119	legal power or authority	
juror	6	11	84	186	jury member	
justice	6	11	82	3386	administration of law	
justify	6	11	74	4844	give a good reason	
juvenile [n]	6	11	74	250	young person	
K in keeping with	13	18	91	420	in harmony with, matching	
key [adj]	8	13	75	6492	important	Used excessively as a synonym for 'very important', 'crucial', 'vital', to the fury of some.
L laboratory	6	11	80	3730	testing room	
laminare [v]	13	18	65	14	to split into layers	Or to lay laminate flooring (strips of wood etc).
landlord	6	11	79	3477	owner of rented property	
language	4	9	78	6897	words	
lapse [v]	12	17	71	770	go out of effect, come to an end	
largely	12	17	52	7263	mainly	
laser	16	21	38	1271	intense beam of radiation	
late	6	11	71	2337	dead	
lath	12	17	73	54	long thin wood	Strip of wood used with plaster as building material for walls.
launch [n, v]	8	13	82	8767	start	
lavatory	8	13	82	728	washroom, toilet, wc, loo	'Public conveniences' and 'public lavatories' are still seen on some British signs, but 'toilets' is taking over. Some regard 'toilets' as an insufferably middle-class word, so if you fall among such snobbish company, you could always try 'garderobe' instead – this will imply a medieval castle somewhere in your family tree.
law	4	9	83	31402	rule, legislation, enactment	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
lawful	4	9	67	506	right by law	
layman	12	17	57	355	a non-professional – non-expert	There are 34 BNC occurrences for 'layperson/lay person'.
lead [n]	–	–	–	286		For example, 'taking the lead' – as in 'main person leading a team or organisation'. BNC has 573 instances of 'lead' as a modifier, eg 'lead singer'.
lead [v]	–	–	–	195		Public servants often use this verb in phrases like 'We lead on policy for schools.' Hard to like.
leaflet	6	11	71	1979	single-sheet document	Most people call a (multi-sheet) booklet a leaflet, to the chagrin of old-time printworkers who, if provoked, will point a hoary finger at dictionary definitions supporting their contrary view.
leasehold	12	17	57	221	held by lease	
leave [n]	8	13	79	359	permission	'Leave of the court' may befuddle some. 'Permission' is easier.
legal	4	9	69	12981	lawful	
legible	8	13	73	98	easy to read	Meaning that the typography, eg type size, is easy on the eye. Thus, different from 'readable'.
legitimate	10	15	76	220	lawful	BNC is an estimate for the 'lawful' sense.
legislation	6	11	75	6960	law, body of law	
lessee	13	18	67	223	tenant, leaseholder	Much clearer to use 'tenant' or, as the case may be, 'leaseholder'.
lessor	12	17	68	181	rents property	Person who owns the property or land being leased; landlord.
letting	–	–	–	134		For instance, letting property for rent, as in 'our lettings policy'.
lia(i)se	–	–	–	308	meet, discuss, work with	
license [v]	6	11	92	216	permit by law or rule	A very low LWV score and a very low BNC score, so it's seemingly well known but little used. In British English, the verb is often misspelt as if it were the noun 'licence'. In US English, 'license' is used for both the verb and noun and thus, as in English, for the adjective 'licensed'.
licensee	10	15	68	233	a licensed person	
in lieu of	12	17	43	203	instead of	The acronym PILO is sometimes seen, ie pay in lieu of.
leverage	–	–	–	175		Earning a greater profit or incurring a greater loss on an investment in proportion to the amount originally invested. An investment fund that uses leverage as part of its strategy may have higher profits and losses than those of a fund that does not use leverage.
levy	10	15	73	528	tax or standard fee	
liable	8	13	69	2225	responsible	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
ligament	10	15	79	243	tough connective tissue linking bones	
likelihood	10	15	76	1182	probability	
limitation	6	11	74	2710	restriction, boundary	
lintel	16	21	62	121	top of door frame	Strong bar that sits atop the supporting pillars or brickwork to the side of the door or window.
literally	–	–	–	1935	actually	Take care when using this as an emphaziser. For example, 'I was literally consumed by jealousy' would mean the green-eyed monster had chewed up even your vocal cords.
literature	6	11	77	1783	writings	Often used to mean publications, leaflets, guides etc.
litigate	13	18	43	34	carry on a lawsuit, take legal action	
litigant	16	21	82	185	party to lawsuit	
loan	4	9	67	6450	sth borrowed	
loan shark	12	17	66	21	unregistered moneylender charging high rates	
locality	6	11	74	1134	place	
locate	4	9	69	1265	find	Often redundant, eg 'The stopcock is [located] beneath the kitchen sink.'
locate	8	13	73	2307	position, place	
location	4	9	69	3893	place	
locomotion	10	15	79	91	ability to move	
lodge [v]	–	–	–	101	to rent a room in sb else's home	
lodge	12	17	60	399	to place	As in 'lodge documents'.
lodger	6	11	70	271	room renter – in sb else's home	
lodging	4	9	69	408	place to stay	In British English it's usually 'lodgings' and means a rented room, usually B&B.
loft	6	11	68	630	attic – roof space	
loiter	8	13	86	118	linger idly, hang about without purpose	
long-standing	10	15	71	118	lasted/lasting a long time	
lubricant	6	11	67	125	oil, grease	
lubricate	6	11	69	77	grease	

M

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
lucrative	16	21	76	514	profitable	
macadam	16	21	60	28	paving material	
machine	4	9	73	12357	mechanical device	
magistrate	10	15	68	2843	judge	
magnitude	8	13	68	939	size	
maiden name	6	11	85	74	female's name before marriage	
mainstream [n]	–	–	–	103	main part (of a service or financial system)	
mainstream [v]	–	–	–	1	to make part of the main way of doing things	Fashionable jargon, strange to many, eg 'We are mainstreaming equalities into our policies.'
maintain	8	13	92	12427	keep up, keep in good working order	
maintenance	–	–	–	<30	money children etc live on after eg divorce	There were no occurrences of this meaning in the sample of 50 of the BNC's 3,967 citations for maintenance of buildings etc. There were 2 citations for 'maintenance money', 12 for 'child maintenance' and 13 for 'maintenance payment(s)'.
major	6	11	95	23351	most important – main	
majority	6	11	69	9822	greater part	Often, 'most of' can replace 'the majority of'.
malfunction	8	13	67	96	fault	
malicious	12	17	79	336	with ill will	
malignant	12	17	69	387	harmful	
malnutrition	6	11	69	191	inadequate/inappropriate food	
malpractice	10	15	88	148	wrongdoing by a professional	
management	6	11	68	8098	directors, people in charge	
mandate	12	17	86	684	an order	So a direct debit mandate is now usually called a direct debit instruction.
mandatory	10	15	75	974	compulsory	
manifest [v]	13	18	58	678	show	
manifestation	13	18	65	863	showing, appearance, sign	
manifold [adj]	12	17	74	54	having various forms	
manipulate	8	13	71	106	handle with skill	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
manner	4	9	67	4870	way of doing	
manufacture [v]	4	9	69	7363	make	
map out	6	11	70	167	to plan	Often used instead of the more straightforward 'plan'.
marginal	6	11	72	2160	borderline, at the edge, close to limit	Often used when 'slight' will do, eg, 'The effect of the policy change was marginal.'
marital	10	15	74	713	of married state	
markedly	12	17	79	666	noticeably	
masticate	13	18	76	14	chew	
material	10	15	73	126	significant, relevant, important	'Material facts' is likely to be less well understood than 'relevant facts' or 'significant facts'.
materializ(s)e	8	13	69	464	become real, happen, occur, appear	
matter of course	12	17	72	176	a thing taken for granted	High level, and opaque for non-native speakers.
mature [v]	–	–	–	696	ripen; be due for payment	
maturity	12	17	49	411	due for payment (eg, an insurance policy)	
maximum	6	11	69	5057	the most	
mean	12	17	77	1631	a kind of average	
means	8	13	67	6413	way of doing	
mechanism	–	–	–	4081	way, method	
mediate	12	17	67	894	make peace, resolve conflict	
mediator	12	17	80	310	peacemaker, resolver of conflict	
medium	13	18	78	689	means for doing	Often used for effect and can be omitted, eg through the medium of print.
mentor	12	17	70	289	friendly adviser	
merchandise	6	11	75	246	goods, things for sale	
merge	12	17	84	1409	combine	
merit [v]	8	13	67	374	deserve	
method	6	11	85	17816	plan or way for doing sth	
microbe	6	11	70	135	simple plant/animal	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
midst	6	11	75	639	in the middle of	Now quite dated, like 'amongst' and 'whilst'.
migraine	12	17	71	209	severe headache-like symptoms	
mildew	8	13	72	97	mould	
minimal	13	18	76	1372	least possible, little (eg 'minimal impact')	
minimum	8	13	84	5007	smallest amount, least, lowest	
ministry	12	17	37	4817	government department	
minor [adj]	8	13	85	4446	smaller	
minority	8	13	72	4325	smaller part	It's often possible to recast phrases like 'It's a minority sport' with the more concrete 'Few people play cricket in China.'
miscarriage	8	13	70	236	premature birth	
miscellaneous	6	11	67	247	of various kinds	
misconduct	6	11	78	311	wrong behaviour	In a job setting, unprofessional behaviour leading to warning/dismissal.
misdemeanor	10	15	71	168	less serious offence	
misgiving	16	21	86	322	feeling of doubt	Almost always used in the plural, 'misgivings'. 'Doubts', 'worries' or 'concerns' will usually do.
misinterpret	8	13	84	186	understand wrongly – misunderstand	
mislay	4	9	83	71	lose, put in wrong place	
mobility	8	13	70	1453	ease of movement	
mobilize	8	13	80	319	to make mobile	Often used in care-home reports etc to describe walking or getting around using a frame or wheelchair, eg 'She mobilizes with great difficulty.'
model	4	9	82	17381	something to copy	Also possible are phrases like 'It's a good example.'
moderation	12	17	90	225	not overdoing	
modify	8	13	72	2894	change a little	
modification	10	15	67	1871	partial change	
module	12	17	42	2684	standard unit for measuring	Now usually means a unit or section.
monetary	12	17	55	2820	refers to money – financial	
monies	16	21	72	390	sums of money, money	A lawyers' favourite, but archaic and unnecessary. Use one of the options shown.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
monitor [v]	10	15	67	2811	guard, check	The usual sense now is 'keep a check on' eg progress.
moratorium	16	21	39	215	delay, ban, temporary stop on sth	A hard word often used with little or no explanation in insurance policies.
moreover	8	13	77	4229	also, as well, what's more	
mortar [n]	10	15	76	200	building material	
mortgage [n]	6	11	70	3415	claim on property, debt secured by mortgage	
mortgagee	12	17	76	342	sb having a claim on a property, lender	
mortgagor	–	–	–	71	debtor in a mortgage, borrower	Often confused with 'mortgagee'. 'Lender' and 'borrower' will often do, once the precise mortgage relationship is made clear.
mother tongue	12	17	58	156	your own language	
multiply	4	9	90	1229	increase in number	
mutual	10	15	80	2217	shared feeling	Common in, eg, 'mutual exchange' (of a rented home), in which people swap houses.
myocardial	12	17	77	241	of the heart muscle	
myopia	13	18	66	41	near-sightedness	
N nasal	10	15	92	275	sounds through nose	Also for nasal tubes, inhaling sprays etc.
natal	16	21	97	54	relating to birth, birth	
national	12	17	69	502	citizen of a country	
native	8	13	70	373	inborn	Also 'native language' (the one you learnt as a child). See also 'mother tongue'.
nausea	8	13	67	279	sickness in stomach; having that feeling	
navigate	–	–	–	0	guide someone to (a service)	<50 in BNC for other figurative senses. Total concrete instances in BNC, eg sailing, about 160.
necessary	4	9	80	17874	needed	Though 'it is necessary to' is easy English, 'you need to' is clearer as to who should act.
neglect [v]	6	11	71	1004	give no care to, be careless of	
negligence	8	13	83	1273	lack of care	Lawyers need to be sure to explain the legal meaning of the word.
negligible	13	18	66	484	unimportant, small	
negotiate	10	15	69	3358	arrange/discuss terms	
neighbo(u)rhood	4	9	84	1666	places close by, area, locality	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
nest egg	–	–	–	24	sum of money saved for future need	Likely to be opaque to non-native speakers.
network	6	11	79	8891	system	Or, as Samuel Johnson more eloquently put it in his 'Dictionary of the English Language' (1755): 'anything reticulated or decussated, with interstices between the intersections'. He had in mind a string bag or net, rather than a social network.
neurologist	12	17	74	47	expert on nerves	
nevertheless	6	11	69	7045	even so, but, however	
newel	13	18	60	19	banister post	
nominal	12	17	67	482	(of a sum) relatively very small, token	
nominate	6	11	70	1225	put up for election/acceptance, name	
nonetheless	10	15	71	1297	nevertheless, even so, however	
of note	12	17	70	183	having distinction	Alternatives are 'significant/worth mentioning/important'.
notify	6	11	76	979	let know, tell, inform	
notional	–	–	–	237	imaginary, as an idea/suggestion	Rare and easily confused with 'national'.
notwithstanding	13	18	77	728	despite, in spite of, but, however	A lawyers' favourite but BNC shows that 'despite' is 20 times more common.
nourishment	6	11	73	154	food	
noxious	13	18	68	175	harmful – poisonous, toxic	
null	13	18	66	271	of no legal force, void	In the legal doublet 'null and void', only one of them is needed.
numeral	8	13	81	106	number	
numerical	6	11	88	704	in numbers	
numerous	6	11	69	3190	a great many; many	
nutritious	10	15	77	154	nourishing	
nutrition	8	13	73	503	food, the process of absorbing nutrients	
obese	13	18	71	155	overweight, very fat	Now seen as taboo in some organizations, eg schools, which regard it as stigmatizing.
obesity	12	17	67	217	fatness, being overweight	
object	12	17	72	1572	purpose, aim	
objective [n]	12	17	75	6760	aim, goal	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
objective [adj]	13	18	85	1156	led by facts, based on evidence	
obligate	6	11	76	48	require, oblige	A low LWV score and a low BNC score. So the word may be well known in the US but rare in the UK. The legal word 'obligor' is even rarer.
obligatory	12	17	74	327	required, (you) must	
obligation	8	13	83	4102	duty, responsibility	This noun is therefore much more common in the UK than the verb 'obligate'.
obliged	12	17	69	1990	forced	Variations on 'you must' for the positive sense or 'you need not/do not have to' will often avoid this word.
obscure	12	17	83	875	conceal, hide, cover	
observe	6	11	85	7428	watch	
observe (rules)	6	11	68	314	follow, comply with	
obstruct	10	15	76	433	block	
obstruction	10	15	78	571	barrier, blocking the way	
obtain	6	11	69	12706	get	
obtainable	8	13	70	251	can be got(ten)	Often used instead of the more straightforward 'you can get' or 'available'.
occasion	6	11	72	8961	particular time	Used in, for eg 'on this/the next/every occasion'.
occasioned	–	–	–	199	caused by, because of	
occupancy	12	17	65	252	actual possession	Or use variations on 'occupy' (which the figures show is much easier) and 'where you live'.
occupation	6	11	71	2008	job, profession, trade	
occupy	6	11	69	1414	live in	
occur	6	11	83	15456	happen	
odour	4	9	78	928	smell	
offer	8	13	78	5860	sth presented	The business jargon sense, eg, 'Blackpool's cultural offer' is still rare. 'Offering' is possible instead, though authors may think it smacks of the church collection plate. The use of 'spend' instead of 'spending' (eg, 'Our annual spend on paper is £500') is similarly jargonistic and irritating to the more sensitive linguist.
official	6	11	76	4543	relating to an office	
oleaginous	13	18	42	0	greasy, oily	A university college protested to its local authority about the 'oleaginous effluxion' of fumes

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
						from a nearby cafe. The objection failed.
olfactory	13	18	59	79	relating to sense of smell	
ombudsman	16	21	57	332	protector of citizens' rights	
omission	8	13	67	850	thing left out – sth not included	
omit	8	13	89	1528	leave out	
omnivore	13	18	69	14	eating everything	
oncology	16	21	38	40	study of tumours/cancer	
ongoing	10	15	85	686	going on, continuous	
onset	10	15	74	806	beginning, start, outset	A common sense is 'onset of a disease'.
onus	16	21	70	239	obligation, burden, duty	
operate	6	11	72	12165	make work; work	
operation	6	11	73	2393	way sth works; task; function	
operative [n]	12	17	51	205	a skilled worker	Often used by authors to avoid using 'man' in 'workman'. Options are worker, tradesperson, contractor, staff, employee.
operative [adj]	6	11	68	303	in working order, working, in use	
ophthalmologist	16	21	78	3	eye doctor	Note the 'oph' spelling.
opine	16	21	42	68	think, give an opinion	More common in India than in the US or UK where it is regarded as a bit pompous.
opportune	12	17	75	82	timely, convenient	
opt	13	18	53	1798	choose, pick	
optimum	13	18	71	610	best, ideal	
option	8	13	87	9141	choice	
optional	8	13	68	960	not required, matter of choice	
oral	6	11	74	2569	by mouth	
in order to	8	13	76	15017	so as to	An easy phrase, but 'to' will usually do the job.
ordinarily	6	11	83	343	normally, usually	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
organic	–	–	–	380	to do with living matter	Sometimes used to mean 'in a natural way', eg of the growth of a neighbourhood or housing project.
orientation	13	18	70	993	getting one's bearing; leaning; preference	
osteopath	12	17	75	32	treats by manipulation (specifically the limbs)	
other than	8	13	77	4450	except	
otherwise than	–	–	–	149	except	Legalese.
otherwise	6	11	80	8649	if not, or	
outcome	8	13	70	4601	what happens	Results, esp the results of providing social care, as in 'positive outcomes'. Also much used in jargon and euphemistic expressions like 'negative patient care outcomes' (eg, death).
outlet	–	–	–	782		BNC is for the modern sense 'office or shop'. British motorways now have signs informing people of a 'retail outlet' near by.
outpatient	12	17	60	368	a visiting hospital patient	
outright	12	17	78	130	not by instalments	This sense is rare in the BNC, whose citations are mainly for 'total', eg 'an outright ban'.
outset	16	21	86	986	beginning, start	
outstanding	4	9	76	2157	important, better than the rest	
outstanding	16	21	68	839	unpaid, due, owing	A sense that's surprisingly rare and high level. It's redundant in the common phrase 'outstanding debt', since if the debt were not outstanding it would not be a debt. 'We can pay you any outstanding value in the road fund licence' could become '...any value left in...'; while 'amount outstanding under the agreement' could become 'amount owing...'
overarch [v]	8	13	81	2	curve over	
overarching	–	–	–	43	overall; covering or embracing everything	Upwardly mobile word seen in strategies, vision statements, mission statements etc, whenever platitudes are to be sent skywards on a gust of corporate-speak.
overdraft	13	18	51	407	debt on a bank current account	A surprisingly high-level word, so authors of, eg, banking booklets need to explain it. However, LWV gives 'overdraw' as grade 8 (UK 13).
overheads	12	17	79	400	general business expenses	
oversight	8	13	73	67	failure to notice	Can be ambiguous in phrases like 'bank oversight', which may mean the bank has overseen an activity rather than failed to notice sth. Also used as a euphemism for 'error', 'blunder'.
owing to	10	15	78	810	because of	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
P p(a)ediatrician	10	15	67	114	child's doctor	
paedophile	–	–	–	31	sb who sexually abuses children	
palliative	16	21	60	72	making less harsh	
palpitate	13	18	69	13	beat rapidly	
pancreas	8	13	72	190	bodily organ	Not to be confused with London's newly restored and sainted railway station.
panel	6	11	85	2723	discussion group	
on a par with	12	17	63	145	equal to	Or use a variation on the verb 'equal'.
paradigm	16	21	21	675	grammatical table, model, example, pattern	The first issue of a journal about good communications in healthcare tempts subscribers with an article called 'The paradigm shift in healthcare – overcoming challenges in giving patients access to their electronic records'. If 'paradigm shift' appeals, try 'big change' instead.
paragraph [n]	4	9	69	3394	unit of writing, distinct part of a written piece	
parallel	6	11	75	122	(of lines) same distance apart	
paralysis	6	11	72	204	loss of ability to move	
paramedic	13	18	81	97	doctor, medical support worker	BNC gives a low score. TV hospital dramas perhaps make it more heard than seen. Probably not a difficult word.
parameter	16	21	69	1713	mathematical constant, boundary, limit	The vogue for this word is in decline. 'Limit' will nearly always do in non-specialist writing.
paramount	8	13	79	602	supreme	Usually 'most (important)' does the job.
parish	10	15	81	3945	church district	
partially	4	9	70	1286	partly, not entirely	
participant	8	13	69	2761	sb who shares in or takes part	
participate	8	13	75	3268	share in, take part, join in	
particular(s)	10	15	70	620	item(s), detail(s), fact(s)	The LWV gives the singular form but the plural is far more frequent in the BNC.
particularly	6	11	82	21685	especially	
party [n]	10	15	75	8370	one among those making an agreement etc	
paternal	12	17	80	189	fatherly	
paternity	10	15	71	63	fatherhood	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
pathogenic	12	17	51	125	disease-producing	
patient [n]	4	9	67	22739	person cared for by doctor	
pattern [n]	4	9	74	14709	design or model	
payable	8	13	68	1683	due, as a bill	
payee	10	15	74	43	to whom paid	
payroll	6	11	82	404	employee list	
pecuniary	16	21	61	166	of money, financial	
pedestal	16	21	70	158	base support	
pedestrian [n]	6	11	77	841	walker	
peer [n]	12	17	79	298	equal, sb of same age or standing	
penalty	4	9	69	3076	punishment	
pendant	13	18	78	244	hanging ornament	
pending	12	17	84	875	awaiting, waiting for, until, during	
penetrate	6	11	76	101	soak through	Low BNC in this sense, but seems a well-understood word. Also 'to force a way through'.
penis	8	13	75	558	male sex organ	
pension	6	11	67	6330	retirement income	
penultimate	13	18	53	161	next to last	
peptic	12	17	75	238	relating to digestion	
per annum	10	15	71	901	a year	
per cent	6	11	78	41003	in every 100 [BNC inc 'percent'/'percents']	
percentage	6	11	68	3174	part of a whole, proportion	
per diem	12	17	59	4	a day, daily	Latin, best avoided.
perform	4	9	81	9000	do, act	Common, but 'do/make a repair' or just 'repair' is surely clearer than 'perform/effect a repair'.
peril	10	15	76	437	danger	Sometimes seen in insurance documents when describing the 'insured perils' of a contract. Maybe underwriters are closet fans of Beryl the Peril, pony-tailed terror of 'The Dandy' comic, whose pranks always seem a massive insurance risk for all involved.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
period	4	9	70	16402	length of time	Often used redundantly in expressions like 'period of time'. BNC gives 1,078 occurrences of 'period(s) of time'.
periodically	10	15	84	396	at regular times	Also 'often', 'regularly', 'occasionally'.
periphery	16	21	86	326	outer edge	
perishable	8	13	83	94	likely to decay	
permanent	6	11	74	4494	lasting, constant	
permeable	13	18	77	68	able to soak through, able to be saturated	
permissible	6	11	68	345	allowed	LWV says it's easily understood, BNC that it's rare. Compare the score for, eg, 'permanent'.
permission	4	9	61	3358	approval, consent, agreement	
permit [v]	4	9	86	4420	let, allow, agree to	
perpetrate	16	21	24	190	do wrong, commit a crime, blunder	
perpetrator	–	–	–	198	wrongdoer, troublemaker	LWV doesn't list this and BNC shows it to be rare. The word is sometimes seen in leaflets advising people how to complain about antisocial behaviour by neighbours, being preferred by many as non-judgemental compared to 'wrongdoer', 'troublemaker' and 'offender'. The wish to be non-judgemental occurs because some 'wrongdoers' may be mentally ill or otherwise unaware of the effect of their actions (children with some kinds of autism, for example). In fact, though, 'perpetrator' is judgemental, according to the dictionaries. The 'New Oxford' gives it as sb who carries out a 'harmful, illegal, or immoral action'. You could try 'alleged wrongdoer' the first time in your document, then 'wrongdoer' afterwards. Phrases like 'person you are complaining about' soon become tedious and hard to handle.
perpetuity	13	18	70	89	for ever	
perquisites	12	17	19	55	fringe benefits	Or 'perks'.
per se	16	21	80	359	in itself	Latin, best avoided.
personally	4	9	75	616	as for myself	Usually redundant.
personnel	10	15	70	3305	people, staff, group of workers	
persons	–	–	–	4034	people	Legal 'persons' include non-humans such as companies. Where this could cause confusion, an explanation of 'persons' will help.
perspective	10	15	74	3032	view from a distance, viewpoint	
peruse	16	21	25	107	read/examine/study carefully	So not just a posh word for 'read'.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
pharmacist	6	11	69	205	druggist, high-street chemist	
phase	8	13	75	5474	a stage in growth	
physical	6	11	72	6573	of the body	
physiotherapy	13	18	59	211	treatment by massage	
pilot [adj]	–	–	–	1095	experimental or test version	As in 'pilot scheme'.
pilot [v]	4	9	68	199	steer, direct, control	
pioneering	–	–	–	417	being the first in the field	Often used in overblown descriptions of new schemes and strategies, to mean 'new'.
pituitary gland	10	15	80	26	body part (organ beneath the brain)	
pivotal	12	17	52	183	of key importance	
place [v]	4	9	88	12393	put	
placebo	12	17	38	392	fake pill or drug	Easily confused with the forename of a calming Spanish tenor.
pledge [n, v]	4	9	69	1745	promise	
pleura	16	21	84	7	lung membrane	
pneumonia	8	13	92	441	lung disease	
podiatrist	12	17	66	2	foot doctor	Rare in the UK, despite the best efforts of the profession to shift from 'chiropodist'. The website of the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists says, helpfully, 'There is no difference between a chiropodist and a podiatrist.' The latter is used outside the UK.
polemic [n]	16	21	50	143	controversial argument or verbal attack	
policy	4	9	77	5534	insurance contract	
policy	8	13	83	29052	plan of action	
policyholder	8	13	84	558	insured person (usually)	
polyclinic	13	18	30	0	kind of hospital	A clinic that is a GP surgery and also does tests and minor surgical procedures, to take pressure off hospitals. The BNC figure shows how new this term is to Brit E.
population	6	11	79	14485	people living in a place	
possess	6	11	70	4188	have, own	
possessions	6	11	80	832	belongings	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
possibility	4	9	74	6995	chance sth will happen	
postdated	16	21	46	4	dated ahead	
postmortem	10	15	70	37	examination after death	
postoperative	10	15	67	105	after surgical operation	
postpone	4	9	84	1206	put off	'Prepone', used in India when bringing a meeting etc forward, is worth popularizing.
potable	16	21	46	31	drinkable, safe to drink	Rare (though big in French).
potential [adj]	8	13	71	4056	possible	
practicable	10	15	80	583	feasible, practical, can reasonably be done	
practically	6	11	68	1296	almost, nearly	
practitioner	12	17	89	3085	professional in a certain field	
precedence	13	18	80	365	going in front of, priority	
precedent	12	17	68	1173	example set, previous case or legal decision	
preceding	10	15	70	1185	before, going before	
predecessor	12	16	75	1590	former or previous one	
predetermined	8	13	82	232	decided beforehand	
predominant	10	15	79	411	main	'Predominately', presumably formed from the verb 'to predominate' is becoming a common alternative to 'predominantly' and is (horror) allowed by dictionaries.
pre-existing	10	15	82	12	to exist beforehand	'Pre-existing conditions' is often used in insurance documents. The BNC figure is for 'preexisting' – no citations for the hyphenated form.
preference	8	13	80	3123	first choice, choice, option	
prejudice [n]	10	15	68	1368	unreasonable opinion	
prejudice [v]	–	–	–	575	cause harm, make biased, hinder, compromise	Some 150 of BNC are for the 'compromise' sense, eg 'Our case has been prejudiced by this'.
preliminary	8	13	67	1769	coming before	
premium	10	15	92	1121	payment for insurance	
prerequisite [n]	12	17	75	228	sth required beforehand, essential	
prescribe	6	11	73	1938	set, fix, set as remedy	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
preserve [v]	6	11	68	3902	keep safe, protect, maintain	
prevail	13	18	55	835	succeed, overcome	
prevalent	12	17	75	521	widespread, common, often happens	
previous	6	11	71	12072	earlier, coming before, beforehand	
primary	8	13	76	9060	first, main	
principal [adj]	6	11	79	1228	main	
prior to	8	13	67	3119	before	Frowned on in plain-language writing because it leads to nouniness not verbiness, eg 'prior to the commencement of the project' = 'before the project starts'. Sometimes it pops up in the newspapers, despite visceral hatred from subeditors and lecturers in journalism. In 2008 it even appeared in the obituary of a newspaper's former chief sub. What would he have said?
proceed	4	9	69	4122	go ahead, continue	
procure	13	18	81	440	get, obtain, arrange, acquire	Even trainee lawyers sometimes ask what this means, indicating its rarity.
procurement	12	17	68	284	the getting of sth	Organizations now boast 'procurement departments' instead of 'buying departments'. Of course, 'director of procurement' sounds much more grand than, say, 'head of purchasing'.
profile [n]	–	–	–	1597		
profusion	12	17	45	166	plenty, too many, abundance	
prohibit	6	11	70	1199	ban, stop, forbid	
prolong	8	13	81	1508	extend	
promptly	8	13	88	948	quickly, at once, right away, immediately	
promulgate	16	21	30	204	advertise, announce, make public	
property	4	9	76	11621	sth owned	
proportion	8	13	74	6266	part	
proprietary	12	17	68	582	owned or patented	
prospective	16	21	55	1326	expected, possible	
pro rata	16	21	39	57	proportionally, at the same rate	
prorate	16	21	47	0	divide pro rata	A verb seen only in business and official writing, and it hasn't really caught on.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
protocol	–	–	–	1388	formal statement of intent	Also a system of rules.
provide	4	9	70	50753	give, supply	
provenance	16	21	53	224	place of origin, source, history	
provided that	10	15	82	1131	if, as long as, on condition that	
provisions	10	15	72	503	part of legal document, rule [or omit]	
proviso	16	21	77	343	condition	
proximity	16	21	81	662	closeness, nearness	
pruritis	13	18	32	1	itching	
publication	6	11	67	3879	printed item	
pulmonary	12	17	79	234	of the lungs	
pulse [n]	6	11	71	579	heartbeat	
pump-prime	–	–	–	0	figuratively, to get sth ready for action	For example, to put in money to get sth started. Whitehall has tried to popularize this verb for generations but it's never caught on. The 'New Oxford Dictionary of English' gives a leaden example of the style: 'The money was intended to prime the community care pump.'
punctual	10	15	76	66	on time	
purchase [v]	6	11	87	3994	buy	
purchaser	6	11	84	2405	buyer	
purport [n]	12	17	49	19	meaning	A rare noun, and a rare verb in the sense 'intend/pretend' (LWV = 16, UK = 21, BNC = 530).
purpose	10	15	74	14861	reason for doing	
pursuant to	12	17	29	428	in accordance with, under	Legalese.
pursue	8	13	76	4603	follow, take action on	
pus	6	11	81	92	liquid in wound	
put by	12	17	56	–	to place in reserve, save	Easy, but opaque for non-native speakers.
put off	4	9	67	–	delay	Easy, but opaque for non-native speakers.
put up with	4	9	75	666	to stand the unpleasantness	Also 'to have to deal with/cope with/tolerate'. Opaque for non-native speakers.
putrefaction	16	21	68	33	rotting	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
pyorrh(o)ea	8	13	77	2	gum disease	
Q qualify (for)	6	11	72	947	able to get, have ability for, satisfy conditions	
quantify	–	–	–	546	measure	
quantity	6	11	79	4229	amount	
quantum [n]	–	–	–	17	amount (of damages)	Legalese: 'Counsel assesses the quantum at £5,000.'
quarterly	6	11	75	645	four times a year	Also 'every three months'.
quartile	–	–	–	29	one of 4 equal-sized groups	Phrases like 'top-quartile performance' will thus be lost on most people.
quash	13	18	73	337	to put down completely	Also 'stop/prevent/control/check/get rid of'. Sometimes seen in, eg, 'The judge quashed [not 'squashed'] the lower court's decision'.
query [v]	12	17	67	573	question	
quinquennial	13	18	69	15	every 5 years, 5-yearly	
quit	6	11	84	130	leave a place	As in 'notice to quit' – BNC figure is for leaving a place only, not (eg) a job. Easy word.
quorum	10	15	79	148	required number for voting	
quota	10	15	70	1401	assigned (or required) part	Or 'share/load/amount'.
quotation	16	21	72	608	current/stated price	
R radial	10	15	76	403	branching out from centre	
radiation	6	11	81	1709	exposure to radioactivity	
radical	10	15	68	4014	extreme	As in 'make radical changes'. The root of this word is the Latin 'radix', a root, so the usual sense is 'far-reaching/fundamental/thorough', and the LWV meaning 'extreme' is one of the more extreme definitions. The word has been banned at one left-of-centre journal as being too clichéd and meaningless.
radioactive	6	11	89	795	giving off radioactivity	
radiology	12	17	33	46	the science of using x-rays	
radiotherapy	12	17	50	210	x-ray treatment	
raft of	16	21	68	47	large collection of	As in 'raft of changes, new policies, regulations, laws' etc. The inevitable image is of bureaucrats and politicians clinging to the wreckage of some sparkling new initiative that has sunk on its maiden voyage.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
rafter	8	13	68	160	roof beam	
rank [n]	6	11	82	1232	position	Or 'place'.
rank [v]	–	–	–	840		
rapport	12	17	41	296	harmony, relationship, communication	
rarely	6	11	68	4113	not often, seldom	
rash [n]	6	11	81	178	spots on skin	
ratify	10	15	68	618	approve	
ratio	8	13	70	3638	relationship of numbers, proportion	
rationale	16	21	88	561	reasoned principles	Or reasoning for/behind sth.
raw	8	13	82	2382	in natural state	
re	16	21	60	1211	in the matter of, concerning	Latin. BNC includes the rarer 'in re'. Omit 're' and 'in re' from headings. If citing cases, just say, eg, 'In Jones v Bloggs (1988).'
reach [v]	6	11	76	20747	to get to	Used figuratively in the expression 'hard-to-reach groups', often seen in British government documents of the late 20th and early 21st century. BNC gives only two citations for it, though.
reading	10	15	70	706	record shown by instrument	
realistic	6	11	70	1849	lifelike	More often used to mean 'reasonable/practicable/feasible'.
realiz(s)e	12	17	16	301	change property to money, sell	So a phrase like 'assets held in property may not be readily realizable' could be difficult to many readers.
realm	12	17	46	754	special field or area	Seen in, eg, planning documents, eg, 'the public realm', meaning public spaces/areas.
reap	12	17	39	416	get as reward	Phrases like 'reap the benefit/reward' therefore seem quite high level.
rear [n]	4	9	75	865	back part	
rear [v]	12	17	82	474	raise a family	Better to use 'raise', as 'rear' seems more suited to livestock.
rearrange	4	9	72	410	put into a different order	
reassemble	6	11	74	138	put together again	
reassure	8	13	81	1735	restore/give confidence	
rebate [n]	16	21	72	285	money returned	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
receipt	6	11	69	1068	receiving	Phrases like 'he is in receipt of benefit' are crisper as 'he is getting benefit' or 'he receives...'
receive	4	9	81	25026	get, obtain	
recession	10	15	76	3877	business is poor	Can be explained as, say, 'period when the economy doesn't grow'.
recidivism	–	–	–	15	repeat offending	Rare, and often possible to use 're-offending', eg 'rates of re-offending'.
recipient	10	15	76	1136	person who receives	
reciprocal	12	17	54	517	in return	
reckless	6	11	81	558	not careful	
reclaim	6	11	88	561	demand return of, take back	
reclamation	12	17	51	182	restore to former state	
recogniz(s)e	6	11	79	16100	know sb or sth, accept	
recogniz(s)ance	16	21	25	4	legal obligation	
recollect	8	13	68	222	remember	
recommence	6	11	80	69	begin again, restart	
recommend	6	11	80	5999	speak in favour of, suggest	
recompense	13	18	58	50	payment in return/compensation	
reconsider	6	11	91	546	think about again	
recoup	13	18	33	242	to get back	
recourse	12	17	20	484	source of help	
recover	6	11	82	2029	get back	
rectify	10	15	77	464	put right, remedy	
rectum	8	13	71	181	lower end of intestine	
recuperate	6	11	78	93	get better, recover health	
recur	10	15	79	697	happen again	
recycle	6	11	77	780	return/convert for re-use	
redeem	8	13	77	126	buy back	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
redress [v]	12	17	89	288	set/put right	
reduce	4	9	67	19201	make less, cut	
reduction	6	11	68	6138	making less, cut, decrease	
re-enter	6	11	68	251	go in again	Rarely seen, but easy enough.
refer	8	13	71	1914	send to (specialist doctor, eg)	
reference	10	15	69	6896	mentioning	
in reference to	–	–	–	76	about, for	
with reference to	–	–	–	388	about, for	
referendum	12	17	74	1544	putting an issue to public vote	
refrain (from)	10	15	75	405	not to do	
refund [n]	4	9	70	293	money returned	
refurbish	12	17	55	488	to renovate	
refute	16	21	45	332	prove wrong	
(have) regard (to)	–	–	–	421	bear in mind	Or 'take into account/consider/include'.
regarding	10	15	71	2107	about, concerning, on	
regenerate	8	13	75	233	give new life to, revive	
regime	12	17	73	4086	system of rule	Sometimes seen in material about, eg, hygiene or diet. BNC includes all senses.
regret	6	11	79	1184	be sorry	
regulate	6	11	79	2017	control by rule	'Control' will often do the job.
regulation	6	11	71	6777	rule (often with legal force)	
reimburse	12	17	63	207	repay, pay back	
reinforce	8	13	82	2646	strengthen	
reiterate	12	17	68	609	repeat, restate, say again	
relating to	–	–	–	3173	about, concerning	
in relation to	8	13	74	4725	as it has to do with, about, for	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
relevant	16	21	71	7892	applicable	High level accordingly to LWV, but very common according to BNC.
remain	4	9	74	29325	stay	
remainder	4	9	69	1688	rest	Easy word, but 'rest' will nearly always do.
remit [n]	–	–	–	355		Or use 'brief', 'extent of power', 'scope', 'area of activity'.
remittance	12	17	58	177	payment	
remuneration	16	21	82	487	pay, wage, salary	Sometimes this has a specialized meaning, but usually 'pay' or 'payment' will do.
renaissance	10	15	84	1129	a new birth of sth	
renal	13	18	50	480	relating to the kidneys	
render [v]	10	15	73	765	hand over	
renege	12	17	47	163	back out of agreement	
renew	6	11	74	2297	make new	
renovate	12	17	70	317	make like new	A multisyllabic word for which there's no good alternative in phrases like 'we'll renovate the property'. Makes a welcome change, anyway, from 'refurbish'.
reorganiz(s)e	4	9	81	518	put in a new order	
represent	6	11	74	15437	stand for, show, be, act for	
representation	8	13	79	3634	standing for sth, speaking/acting for sb	
representation	–	–	–	840		Increasingly on public notices people are invited to 'comment' not 'make representations'.
reputable	13	18	72	264	respectable	Also 'reliable/trustworthy'.
request [v]	6	11	75	2483	ask	
require	6	11	75	30234	need, want, demand (with legal power)	Overused in public information when 'need' or 'want' are meant and will sound less pompous.
requirements	6	11	80	6019	things needed, needs	
requisite [adj]	12	17	89	54	needed	
reserve [v]	6	11	68	1157	keep back, set aside	
reside	8	13	70	757	live	
residence	6	11	71	1849	home, where you live	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
residual	12	17	72	692	remaining	Or use variations on 'rest'.
in respect of	10	15	73	3052	in relation to; about; for	
resources	6	11	84	10443	wealth in products	Also used to mean 'money' or 'the things we need'. Purists object to the phrase 'human resources', saying that resources are things and people are not things. But it's here to stay.
respectively	13	18	65	3205	in the order named	Eg, 'Carla and Raul earned €50 and €26 respectively'. The word can often be omitted, though.
respite	12	17	44	383	delay, period of rest	
respond	6	11	81	7137	reply	
response	6	11	80	14461	answer	
responsive	13	18	65	626	sympathetic, responding readily	
restitution	12	17	53	187	payment for loss	
restoration	12	17	73	1944	renewal	
restrain	10	15	72	932	hold back, check	
restrict	6	11	71	3529	limit	
restriction	6	11	81	3986	limit, limitation	
resume	8	13	76	1795	to go on with, restart	
retain	8	13	77	6667	keep	
retention	12	17	39	819	keeping things back	
retina	8	13	78	318	back of eyeball	
retrospectively	13	18	75	159	looking back, dealing with the past	
revenue	8	13	69	5303	income	
revert	8	13	85	839	go back to	Lawyers often use 'I'll revert to you' when meaning they'll reply. BNC has no citations for this.
review	4	9	73	3514	look at again	
revise	8	13	68	2109	change, alter, amend, adjust	
revisit	4	9	87	213	visit again	Often used figuratively in professionals' writing to mean 'reconsider'.
revocable	12	17	60	16	able to be cancelled/taken back/withdrawn	In 1989 the film title 'Licence Revoked' was changed to 'Licence to Kill' because it was thought US audiences wouldn't understand 'revoke', a grade-12 word according to LWV. The theory

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
						that people won't buy stuff they don't understand is worthy of more research: adverts for some cosmetic products spout scientific jargon that only its authors seem to comprehend.
revocation	13	18	65	83	cancellation, withdrawal	
rigorous	12	17	45	654	strict, thorough	
ringfence [v]	–	–	–	42	restrict the use of	
riser	13	18	68	30	part of stair	It's the part the tread rests on.
robust	8	13	68	695	strong and healthy	Used figuratively of policies and plans to mean, eg, 'thorough', 'comprehensive'.
rollout	12	17	56	6	first showing of something new	The verb 'roll out' is also used of new schemes, projects etc to invest them with a bit of military or industrial grandeur. Often 'launch' or variations on the verb 'start' will do the job.
ruling	6	11	75	882	a decision	
rural	6	11	68	6205	from the country	
S safeguard [v]	6	11	77	722	to protect from harm (keep safe)	
(the) said	12	17	72	523	mentioned (above)	Legalese, eg 'we have read the findings of the said document and accept the same' = 'we have read the findings of the document [specify what it is if necessary] and accept them'.
(the) same	–	–	–	386	it [or otherwise be specific]	Legalese.
saliva	6	11	80	233	liquid in mouth	
sanction [v]	13	18	68	497	give approval, agree	As this word can also mean 'impose a penalty', the context needs to be clear.
sanitary	4	9	69	283	free from germs	
satisfy	8	13	71	471	pay in full	
satisfy	4	9	68	861	fulfil/meet wishes/needs/conditions	
save [prep/conj]	16	21	43	589	except	Legalese.
scarce	4	9	67	733	hard to find	
schedule [n]	4	9	67	2668	timetable	
scheme [n]	6	11	76	16230	plan of action	
sciatica	16	21	67	31	neuralgia (pain) of hip and thigh	
scientific	4	9	70	5799	methodical way of studying things	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
sclerosis	13	18	63	171	a hardening of organ tissues	
scope	12	17	76	3426	range	
screen [v]	10	15	73	415	to sift or sort; test for a disease or condition	
scrutiny	16	21	86	1198	close examination	
scrutiniz(s)e	12	17	54	505	read/examine/study carefully	
seamless	–	–	–	131	well coordinated or free from gaps	'Seamless provision' is often seen canoodling in a quiet paragraph with 'joined-up thinking'.
sector	12	17	73	10980	part of circle	But mainly used figuratively to mean 'area/part of sth', as in 'public, third, voluntary sector'.
secure [v]	–	–	–	4236	manage to get	Often seen in official documents as 'to secure funding' meaning 'to get funding' or 'to obtain a promise of money'. BNC also gives 944 citations for the verb that means 'make sth secure'.
security	6	11	73	12167	keeping safe	
security	12	17	70	3431	sth given as pledge	
securities	8	13	76	1921	stocks and bonds	
sedative	8	13	89	114	soothing medicine/drug	
sedentary	16	21	51	140	requiring sitting, sitting	
seek	8	13	75	16753	try	Also 'look for', 'try to get', 'find'.
seize	4	9	68	2564	to take by force	
select [v]	4	9	68	6515	choose	
semen	10	15	70	150	sperm-carrying liquid	
separate [v]	4	9	70	4079	take/split apart	
serve	8	13	79	1102	to deliver (a legal order)	
settle	8	13	68	5299	pay, pay off	
several	4	9	69	23446	more than 2	Common and easily understood multisyllabic word.
several	13	18	17	0	separate, individual (as used in the law)	The rarity of the sense in 'joint and several liability' suggests that alternatives like 'you will each be liable together and as individuals' is much more likely to be understood.
severe	6	11	69	4559	harsh, serious	
shoplifter	6	11	71	46	sb who steals goods	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
sibling	12	17	74	443	a brother or sister	Social workers and teachers may like to note how high level and uncommon this is.
have sight of	–	–	–	15	see	As in over-formal phrases like 'please let me have sight of the report'. Prefer 'see' or 'read'.
signage	–	–	–	12	an array of signs	Often, 'signs' is possible.
signatory	13	18	36	369	sb who signs a document	
signature	4	9	67	1500	name signed in own writing	
signify	8	13	70	900	show the meaning of	
signpost [v]	–	–	–	69	to direct sb	Possible are 'send to' and 'tell where to find', but this does seem a good new use of the word.
similar	4	9	70	18295	much the same, in the same way	
sinking fund	12	17	43	14	money set aside to meet a big future expense	Paid into by, eg, leaseholders, usually with a sinking heart.
situation	6	13	72	19474	condition (circumstances)	
situation	12	17	65	76	job	Now rare in this sense.
slanderous	8	13	73	18	making harmful statements	Particularly, lying in a way that harm sb's reputation. BNC gives 114 citations for 'slander'.
slaughterhouse	6	11	76	98	abattoir	
slats	8	13	82	80	narrow boards	Eg, narrow strips of wood.
sleeve	10	15	85	36	covering for a machine part	
smear	12	17	86	106	a sample for microscope	
soffit	16	21	63	22	a support in architecture	
soft skills	–	–	–	0		Skills that can't be measured, such as communicating, negotiating, time management.
software	12	17	20	9365	instructions for operating computers etc	Few people had a computer when the LWV was prepared, so only the BNC score is reliable.
solar plexus	12	17	39	36	nerve centre	
solely	10	15	68	1639	alone, only	
solicitor	16	21	61	5700	lawyer	The high LWV score (and thus UK score) arises because this word is not widely used in the US. BNC shows it's common in the UK.
solvent [adj]	13	18	60	3	able to pay debts	
source [n]	8	13	70	15413	origin	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
source [v]	–	–	–	101	to find, look for, manage to get	
spacious	8	13	83	641	roomy, large	
spasm	12	17	78	285	strong muscle contraction	
spasmodic	12	17	92	77	in sudden bursts	
species	8	13	90	9563	kind (of animal, plant)	
specify	6	11	71	5296	state in detail, state, identify	LWV and BNC show that this is an easy and often-seen word.
specifically	8	13	69	3722	in particular, particularly	
specimen	8	13	82	2524	sample, example	
spectrum	16	21	58	1965	a scale of values	Also 'range'.
speculate	13	18	80	799	to guess at, imagine	
sperm	8	13	71	426	fertilizing fluid	
sphere	8	13	68	1396	an area of activity	
sphincter	13	18	55	352	ringlike muscle	
spillage	–	–	–	145		Probably not difficult but 'spill' is possible.
sporadic	16	21	70	341	occasional	
stabiliz(s)e	8	13	76	748	make firm	Also make/become steady.
stakeholder	–	–	–	81	interested person/party	
stanch	12	17	36	1	stop/restrain flow of blood etc	
starter	8	13	77	106	primer for fluorescent lights	BNC figure includes 'starter motor'.
state [v]	8	13	89	8548	say clearly, write down, tell	A useful alternative to 'say', 'tell', 'inform'.
statement [n]	10	15	68	1633	a financial report	
status	10	15	76	9246	position/condition	
statutory	13	18	82	3753	legal, by law	Though this is often seen as part of notices in UK shops, eg 'Your statutory rights are unaffected', it would be interesting to know whether 'This does not affect your rights under law' or 'This does not affect your legal rights' would be better understood. Not to be confused with 'statuary'.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
staunch [v]	13	18	42	18	stop/restrain flow of blood etc	
stem (from)	8	13	81	974	to branch/develop/result from	
sterile	6	11	68	62	germ-free	A surprisingly low BNC score, where most of the uses are figurative (eg 'a socially sterile attitude towards art'). LWV suggests it's more common in the clean-living US.
sterling [n]	12	17	73	1376	the British unit of money – the pound	
stimulate	8	13	68	2111	rouse/persuade to action	
stipulate	12	17	80	571	impose condition, specify, require	
stock market	6	11	67	734	place to buy/sell shares	
stoma	16	21	79	50	small opening	
stool	12	17	39	108	bowel movement	Like the 'proper' names of sex organs and many other medical terms, this is a high-register word. Not to be confused with what is sat upon. A notice at the NEC in Birmingham (UK) says: 'Children's stools are available from the counter. £2 each deposit.'
stopcock	12	17	71	49	a shut-off valve	Can be explained as a screw tap that turns off, eg, mains water supply.
stopgap	16	21	55	33	temporary substitute	Also possible are short-term/temporary measure/solution.
stoptap	–	–	–	4	a shut-off valve – stopcock	
strabismus	12	17	21	7	being cross-eyed	
straightaway	12	17	56	924	right now	'Immediately' is much simpler. BNC figure includes 'straight away', which is the more common spelling by about 9 to 1.
straightforward	10	15	76	156	honest, direct, frank	
strand [n]	–	–	–	704	part	Now sometimes seen in official documents to mean section or part, which is just a bit more prosaic than its use in Reginald Heber's hymn: 'From Greenland's icy mountains/From India's coral strand/Where Afric's sunny fountains/Roll down their golden sand.' The LWV has only the literal sense as a grade 8 word meaning 'one of the threads in a rope'.
strategic	12	17	77	3033	planned skilfully	Sometimes used as a meaningless prefix, as in 'strategic thinking'. If you have to use 'strategic', you can explain it as having to do with the big picture as against 'tactical', which is to do with the more detailed day-to-day steps in reaching a goal.
strategy	8	13	82	8816	skilled planning, plan	
stream	4	9	84	1736	a continuous flow	Sometimes used to suggest smooth, cooperative and efficient working.

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strenuous	8	13	76	308	requiring effort/energy	
streptococcus	8	13	83	19	kind of bacteria	
stress [v]	6	11	67	3612	emphasize	
stringent	16	21	90	489	strict, tough	
structure [n]	6	11	69	17210	sth built/erected/constructed	
subcontract [v]	6	11	73	138	employ under a contract	
subject to [adv]	12	17	49	5100	on condition, conditional upon, if	
subjective	16	21	79	1139	based on opinion/personal judgement	
sublet	13	18	66	61	re-rent	Means to let to sb else all or part of a property you are renting yourself.
submit	10	15	80	1355	hand over, send, give	As this has connotations of subservience, it's best avoided if possible.
subsequent	12	17	75	4383	following, after	
subsequently	–	–	–	3646	later, then	'Then', 'afterwards' or 'later' will nearly always do. Not to be confused with 'consequently' (therefore, so).
subside	12	17	55	436	to become less	BNC figure excludes the literal and figurative sense 'sink'.
subsidence	12	17	33	291	dying down	The LWV meaning, 'dying down', is now rare. The BNC score is for the sinking of land.
subsidy	12	17	75	1840	money for support	
substantial	10	15	68	6174	large, great, a lot of	
subsidiary	12	17	73	257	owned by a larger body	
substantially	12	17	84	1708	largely	
substantive	16	21	23	951	having reality/substance, meaningful	
succeed	8	13	67	826	to follow on after	As in succeeding to a tenancy.
succession	–	–	–	624	act of taking over (throne, position, tenancy)	
such [predet]	6	11	76	19581	like this, that	Plain-English devotees tend to get jittery about 'such', eg 'We will give you a starter tenancy for the first year. With such a tenancy you won't have all the rights of an assured tenant.' It's hard to see any harm in the word, though often 'this' or 'that' will do.
suffer	4	9	77	10787	have pain	Though 'suffer violence/harassment' is common, some people prefer to say 'be a victim of

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
						v/h', while yet others say this smacks of victimhood and speak of themselves as survivors of v/h or 'facing' or 'experiencing' v/h. 'Suffer' in the sense of 'let' or 'allow' is rare.
suffice	–	–	–	640	to be enough	Now rare.
sufficient	8	13	67	5882	enough	
sui generis	12	17	45	33	unique, of its own kind, a one-off	Latin swank sometimes seen in estate-agent descriptions of 'executive homes' and other 'superior and exclusive residences'.
summons	8	13	85	842	order to court	
superior	8	13	86	2169	more, better	
supersede	16	21	67	481	take the place of	As the spelling guides always say, the only word ending in <i>sede</i> .
supervise	8	13	68	1422	oversee	
supplement [v]	8	13	74	1217	add to	
supplementary	8	13	75	981	additional, extra, more	
supply	6	11	85	6662	provide, give, sell, deliver	
suppository	12	17	52	15	capsule inserted in body	
surgeon	4	9	83	1641	doctor who operates	Easily confused with a type of fish, but only if the operation is being done under water.
surname	16	21	70	431	sb's last name	
surplus	8	13	79	2060	extra quantity – what's left over/spare	
surrender [v]	6	11	91	660	give up	
surrender [v]	12	17	68	27	exchange for cash	
suspend	6	11	71	2909	stop for a time	
suspension	10	15	71	1557	stoppage for a time	
sustainable	–	–	–	677	able to grow and survive long term	One of the more harmless buzz words of the age.
syringe	10	15	80	292	a device for squirting	But not, obviously, a water pistol. 'Needle' will usually do.
T tailor [v]	6	11	86	496	make to fit	Also meaning to design to suit sb's needs.
tampon	12	17	79	88	absorbent pad	
tangible	12	17	74	594	actual, real	

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tantamount	16	21	51	147	equivalent	
target [v]	–	–	–	1214	aim for	Often, to aim specifically for/focus specifically on/include or consider in particular.
targeted	–	–	–	64	aimed at	For example, 'targeted services', supposedly aimed at specific group(s) of people.
tarmac	16	21	67	387	paving material	A surprisingly high LWV score. Despite its low BNC score, this is likely to be far better understood than terms like 'bituminous materials'.
be tasked to	–	–	–	26	to be given a specific job/project	
taxation	6	11	74	2503	putting a tax on	The noun or verb 'tax' will often do.
technical	8	13	80	6737	detailed, needing special knowledge	
technician	8	13	89	819	has special skill	Engineer, skilled worker, employee, staff.
temporary	6	11	67	3794	lasting a short while	
tenancy	12	17	60	765	use of another's land/property for rent	People should be able to deduce 'tenancy' from 'tenant', a sixth-grade word.
tender [n]	12	17	55	265	sth offered in payment	A formal costed offer to supply goods or do a piece of work.
tender [v]	13	18	66	213	to offer	To offer to supply goods or do a piece of work at stated rates.
tentative	10	15	67	566	hesitant, undecided	As in the good advice, 'Always be tentative about sleeping in a tent.'
tenure	13	18	75	723	right to hold land/property etc	
term	6	11	90	2960	a period of time	Used in insurance policies and for mortgages/loans – the length of time it lasts – BNC score includes term of office, school term etc but not phrases like 'short term' or 'in the long term'.
terminable	12	17	74	8	can be ended	
terminal	–	–	–	133	incurable, causing death	
terminate	12	17	80	1190	end, bring to an end, stop, cease	LWV suggests it's a high-register word. BNC shows it's not so rare in the UK.
terms	8	13	90	4741	conditions for agreement	
in terms of	12	17	55	10262	with reference to	Usually 'for' will do.
territory	6	11	70	444	area of land	
tertiary	16	21	52	385	third stage	Seen in public documents to mean post-secondary education (eg, university). Also seen in health documents (eg, 'tertiary care' = care at a specialist centre). Little known.
testament	8	13	79	25	will	

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testator	12	17	29	310	will-maker, sb who leaves a valid will	
testatrix	12	17	43	4	female will-maker	
testicles	10	15	67	94	male sex glands	Easily confused, in some circumstances, with the wiggly bits of an octopus.
testify	6	11	86	206	give evidence under oath in court	
tetanus	12	17	76	142	lockjaw	
therapeutic	12	17	73	676	healing	
therapy	8	13	77	2088	treatment of diseases	
thereafter	6	11	80	1438	afterwards, then, after that	
thereat	12	17	31	5	at that place, on that account	Legalese.
thereby	10	15	83	2618	by that means, because of that	
therefor	12	17	64	19	for that purpose	Legalese and likely to be confused by lay people with 'therefore'. Therefore best avoided.
therefore	6	11	69	22984	so	
therein	16	21	44	140	in that place	Legalese.
therein	12	17	51	209	in that matter	Legalese.
thereof	6	11	69	466	of it	LWV suggests this is easily understood, surprisingly. BNC suggests it is rare.
thereon	12	17	27	117	on it	Legalese.
thereunder	10	15	71	42	under it	Legalese.
thereupon	10	15	71	99	immediately after	
thermal	12	17	76	672	of heat	
thermostat	6	11	74	161	regulates heat	
thoroughfare	13	18	61	140	a street	
thoroughly	6	11	82	2045	completely	
those	4	9	75	87053	the ones there	Easy, but 'people' is often preferable.
though	6	11	71	29939	although	
though	6	11	70	4402	even if	

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thread	8	13	70	295	the connecting idea	BNC gives 23 occurrences of the vogue expression 'golden thread', as in 'The golden thread running through all our ideas is clarity of purpose.' Not to be confused with Golden Shred, a depressing brand of marmalade that has only 20g of fruit per 100g, but 63g of sugar, says Robertson's website.
threshold	8	13	70	1129	limit, point of beginning or entry	
thrombosis	16	21	79	114	clotting in vein	
throughout	6	11	77	4291	during the whole time	
thus	8	13	69	20225	as a result, so, therefore	BNC gives this as common, surprisingly. It's rare in mass-audience documents. Perhaps it deserves more exposure there, but 'so' has taken over as the connector of choice.
tier	10	15	67	566	a row	Or layer, level.
timely	12	17	67	392	at the right time	The Scots also use 'timeous', meaning 'in good time', but it's little known elsewhere.
tissue	4	9	81	2001	material of a living thing	
title [n]	4	9	69	1182	right to property	Also common, of course, for 'Mr', 'Mrs' etc
toiletries	10	15	70	104	soap, perfume, etc	It may help to spell out the meaning, eg, 'Bring toiletries like soap, toothbrush, toothpaste.'
tolerance	12	17	63	243	resistance to drugs	
tolerant	10	15	72	344	allows others' beliefs	
tolerate	10	15	75	1149	permit or allow	
torsion	16	21	77	67	twisting	
torso	10	15	74	251	sb's body trunk	
toxic	8	13	82	1219	poisonous	
toxin	16	21	77	435	poison	
tract	8	13	67	209	a large area	
transaction	10	15	68	4384	financial deal	
transfer [v]	6	11	78	5067	switch, move, shift	
transform	6	11	70	3139	completely change	
transfusion	6	11	85	372	transfer of blood	

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transient [adj]	13	18	71	418	of short duration	
transition [n]	12	17	79	2677	change	Now being used as a verb by some, including President Obama: 'It is time for us to transition to the Iraqis.' (7 April 2009)
transmit	4	9	78	1663	send over, pass on	
transparent	6	11	80	708	easily seen through	Also used in officialese as 'easy to understand', eg 'We are focused on transparency.'
transpire	16	21	81	260	happen, occur	
transportation	4	9	71	553	act of conveying/carrying	'Transport' will usually do, but LWV suggests it's well understood (if hideous).
transsexual	–	–	–	100	sb whose sex is changed surgically	
trauma	13	18	66	632	emotional shock	
tread	12	17	39	30	part of the stair	Steps – the part of a staircase you step on. See 'riser'.
treatment	4	9	75	8051	medical help	
trend	10	15	73	4705	general direction, pattern	
trespass	4	9	77	180	enter property unlawfully	
tribunal	13	18	79	2120	court of justice	Formal body that makes a binding decision – eg, leasehold valuation tribunal.
triennial	10	15	74	45	three-yearly	
trust [n]	4	9	80	104	property held or protected on sb's behalf	
in trust	12	17	52	103	being managed for another	
trustee	10	15	80	2079	member of a board with specific powers	
tuberculosis	6	11	71	356	lung disease	'TB' can be used after the initial explanation.
turnover	12	17	75	2891	yearly business activity (value of sales)	
twofold	8	13	67	214	having two parts	
typically	8	13	89	2100	ordinarily, usually, normally	
typify	16	21	61	292	represent	
ultimately	12	17	80	2839	in the end, finally	
ultimo	16	21	25	0	last month	'I refer to yours [ie, "your letter"] of the 10th ultimo.' Now used only by old-fashioned lawyers.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
unabated	13	18	27	84	not lessened	
unaccustomed	6	11	84	157	not used to	
unaffected	8	13	84	516	not changed or influenced	
unaided	6	11	87	130	not helped; without using help; by yourself	
unattended	8	13	74	156	alone	Or not being watched or looked after, as in 'Do not leave bags unattended'.
unauthoriz(s)ed	8	13	69	449	not officially approved	It would be good to see some variation on the common officialese 'No unauthorized persons past this point'. Perhaps: 'Pass here only with proper permission.'
unanimous	8	13	68	458	all in agreement	
unaware	6	11	82	1133	not noticing/knowing	
unbiased	10	15	68	119	without prejudice; fair; balanced	
uncomfortable	6	11	78	1329	uneasy, not relaxed, awkward	
unconditional	12	17	79	355	without reservations or conditions	
unconscious	6	11	69	1363	not awake or mentally aware	
unconventional	12	17	74	169	not bound by rule; unusual	
underbid	6	11	82	17	offer a lower price; gazunder	
undergo	10	15	79	1869	go through	Or have, eg, an operation or surgery.
underlying	12	17	75	2869	basic; beneath	
undernoted	–	–	–	19	stated below	This survives in insurance-speak, especially in Scotland, eg 'the undernoted agreement'.
underpin	–	–	–	637	be the support/foundation/basis for	BNC gives only 4 citations for the literal sense of pinning beneath.
(the) undersigned	12	17	60	16	I, we, the person signing	
undertake	10	15	79	5774	agree to do, make a legal promise	And 'do' will often do.
undertaking	8	13	78	1471	a task accepted	
underwrite	16	21	87	592	guarantee	
underwriting	12	17	71	248	setting insurance premiums	As this word is neither easily understood nor well known, an explanation that underwriting is the process of assessing risks and setting premiums will often help consumers.
unemployed	4	9	77	2757	jobless	

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unequivocal	16	21	30	255	clear	
unexceptional	12	17	74	46	ordinary	
unexpired	12	17	65	29	still in process/current, not ended	
unfavourable	8	13	54	331	not to advantage – not good, poor	
unforeseen	8	13	75	243	not expected; not predicted	
unicameral	13	18	68	125	single chambered (parliament, eg)	
uniform [adj]	10	15	87	753	same, similar, alike	
unilateral	12	17	80	342	one-sided	
unitary	12	17	76	419	acting as one	
universal	8	13	70	2570	existing everywhere	Open to everyone (of services or benefits, eg).
unnecessary	4	9	87	1821	not needed	
unoccupied	6	11	67	203	vacant	
unreasonably	12	17	71	269	asking for too much, unfairly	
unsightly	10	15	74	149	ugly or unattractive	
unskilled	4	9	70	463	not trained	
unsound	12	17	84	107	not dependable	
untoward	12	17	37	143	unfavourable	
unwieldy	13	18	76	122	hard to manage; cumbersome; unmanageable	
update [v]	13	18	86	1781	make current	
uphold	6	11	71	1097	to support; agree with; stick to, eg a decision	Easy according to LWV but uncommon according to BNC. So, worth explaining.
upkeep	12	17	68	159	maintenance expenses	
upon	4	9	81	21404	on	
upon	6	11	72	1367	when	
uptake	–	–	–	78	adoption or take-up of sth	
ureter	13	18	86	16	urinary tube	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
urethra	13	18	72	93	urinary canal	
usufruct	16	21	30	3	right to use/take advantage of sb's property	
uterus	10	15	69	152	womb	
utilize	10	15	81	1165	make use of, use	The scores give credence to the maxim 'Why use <i>utilize</i> when you can use <i>use</i> ?'
utilization	10	15	72	303	use	
V vacant	4	9	79	274	empty (property)	
vacate	6	11	73	253	leave empty	
vaccinate	6	11	68	90	inoculate	
vacuum	8	13	75	849	empty space	
vade mecum	13	18	56	3	companion	Latin, best avoided.
vade mecum	13	18	17	1	guidebook	Latin, best avoided.
vagina	12	17	78	279	female sex organ	
valid	12	17	75	2271	true, correct	
validate	12	17	76	551	prove true/correct	
valuables	6	11	84	216	jewellery, money etc	
valuation	6	11	82	1441	estimated worth – assessment of worth/value	
valve	8	13	85	1154	sth that regulates flow	
variable	8	13	83	2827	changeable	
variation	8	13	80	5212	change, alteration	
variety	6	11	79	8656	different kinds	Easy, but 'various' (LWV 6) is shorter than 'a variety of'.
vascular	16	21	72	270	relating to a blood vessel	
vasectomy	16	21	99	54	cutting and sealing of man's reproductive duct	
VD	8	13	81	55	venereal disease	
vector	13	18	70	602	directed force	
vector	13	18	26	237	disease carrier	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
vegetarian	8	13	69	148	sb who doesn't eat meat	
vendor	10	15	80	2377	seller	Beloved of estate agents, but 'seller' is more usual.
veneer	12	17	77	116	a thin layer – coating	BNC excludes the figurative sense.
venom	10	15	80	270	poison	
vent	8	13	76	314	(a flap/opening that) lets in air	
ventilate	4	9	67	202	let air in	
ventilation	4	9	71	586	letting fresh air in (and usually moisture out)	
venture [n]	–	–	–	2247	project, business	The noun sense is not in the LWV.
venue	–	–	–	1708	place for an event	The BNC sense of place or building is not in the LWV.
veracious	12	17	36	0	truthful	
veracity	13	18	77	61	truthfulness	
verbaliz(s)e	–	–	–	33	talk about/say/discuss/share	
verge	12	17	76	117	edge or rim	
verifiable	10	15	73	81	checkable, provable	
verify	8	13	72	613	prove true, confirm	LWV suggests it's well understood, BNC that it's unusual.
vermin	13	18	60	101	harmful animals – pests	
versatile	12	17	83	530	does many things well – adaptable	
version	6	11	70	10416	story from sb's point of view	
vertebra	6	11	68	32	bone of spine	
vertical	8	13	67	1771	upright	
vertigo	16	21	66	88	dizziness; sensation of loss of balance	
vessel	6	11	83	503	tube carrying blood	
vet [v]	–	–	–	244	check for suitability	
via	8	13	71	4603	by way of – through/by	
viable	16	21	45	955	capable of living	The figurative sense of 'workable', 'practicable' or 'able to be done' is now common.

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
vice versa	6	11	67	674	other way round	Latin that's now English.
vicinity	6	11	68	578	surrounding area	
victimiz(s)e	12	17	52	145	make a victim of	LWV gives 'victim' as a sixth-grade word.
in view of	12	17	56	1420	because	
vigilant	12	17	60	207	watchful – careful, paying attention to	
violate	6	11	81	672	break a rule or law	
virtually	–	–	–	4333	almost	
in virtue of	12	17	38	123	because	
virus	8	13	78	1982	infective agent that multiplies inside a host	
visa	12	17	74	579	passport stamp/endorsement	
vis-à-vis	13	18	62	68	face to face, about, concerning	French.
vision	6	11	93	2832	farsightedness	A favourite of local councils and companies whose 'vision statements' describe their long-term goals and ambitions. The idea is good but platitudes often abound, as in mission statements. Often a statement of aims, goals or wishes will do the job, with less fluff.
vision	4	9	69	1476	sense of sight – 'sight' is perhaps plainer	
vital	8	13	87	5035	very important, crucial	
vitality	–	–	–	260	very (as in 'vitality important')	
vitiate	16	21	27	98	debase, impair, make invalid	
vocabulary	4	9	67	1266	sb's stock of words	
voice	12	17	73	541	express an opinion	Instead of the stock phrase 'voice your concerns', use 'tell us your concerns/what you think'.
void [adj]	12	17	33	335	empty	Housing jargon uses the noun form to mean empty properties from which no rent is earned.
voidable	12	17	82	88	able to be cancelled	BNC shows its rarity compared to 'void'.
void of	12	17	84	7	lacking	
volatile	12	17	44	509	changeable	
volume	8	13	78	2983	amount it holds	Instead of, eg, 'volume of responses to our survey', use 'number' or 'amount'.
voluntarily	6	11	70	486	willingly	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
voluntary	6	11	70	3888	done by free will; also, often, 'unpaid'	
vulva	12	17	40	49	female sex organ	
vulnerable	12	17	77	2399	able to be hurt	Used (often as a collective noun 'the vulnerable') to mean '(people) who may need extra support', such as the elderly, young, ill or disabled.
waive	13	18	65	353	give up/refrain from applying a right	Often misunderstood, and confused with 'wave'.
waiver	16	21	73	188	giving up/refraining from applying a right	
warrant [n]	6	11	83	814	legal order, authority to arrest	LWV scores for the word's 3 noun senses are averaged here as the senses are similar.
warrant [v]	12	17	41	668	declare true; make a legal, binding promise	In legal documents for non-lawyers, the word needs explanation.
warranty	8	13	67	892	guarantee	In insurance, the insured's breach of sth that he or she has warranted will invalidate the policy.
wary (of)	12	17	62	788	very careful, cautious, guarded, watchful	Surprisingly high level.
wastage	6	11	69	209	the part not used	Easy, but often 'waste' will do.
waste [n]	4	9	72	1428	trash, rubbish	
watercourse	12	17	71	116	river bed	
watershed	16	21	70	64	a divide between waters going to different rivers	
water table	8	13	71	94	underground water level	
watertight	4	9	72	30	not allowing water in or out	
waterway	4	9	73	421	route for travel by water	
wattage	8	13	71	47	electrical power measured in watts	
ways and means	8	13	76	93	methods and resources	
wear and tear	6	11	76	152	damage from use	Easy, but rather idiomatic for non-native speakers.
wedded to	8	13	76	62	devoted or attached to	
welfare	8	13	72	1934	well-being	
whatsoever	6	11	75	943	at all	
whensoever	12	17	68	6	at whatever time, when, whenever	
whereas	13	18	58	6169	considering that, while	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
whereas	12	17	73	6163	but, on the contrary	Surprisingly high-level LWV score.
whereby	12	17	77	1925	by which	
wherein	12	17	64	158	in which	Legalese.
whereof	12	17	87	42	of that	Legalese.
whereon	12	17	72	9	on which	Legalese.
wheresoever	8	13	83	10	wherever	LWV says it's fairly easy, BNC rare. 'Wherever' will always do.
while	8	13	68	48804	although, whilst	
whilst	12	17	75	5775	although, while	
wholly	8	13	69	2215	fully	
whosoever	4	9	69	17	whoever	LWV says it's easy, BNC rare. 'Whoever' will always do.
wil(l)ful	12	17	21	207	deliberate, on purpose	This is often seen in lawyer-inspired wording, but 'deliberate' is more common.
withdraw	4	9	67	4638	take away, take out, remove	Some banks have withdrawn this word and use only phrases like 'take out' your money. LWV and BNC suggest this is excessive.
withhold	6	11	79	875	keep back	An easy word, according to LWV, which is surprising. BNC suggests it's unusual. Any word with a double <i>h</i> needs all the use it can get.
withstand	8	13	67	499	oppose, resist, hold out against	
witness [n]	5	10	80	2782	sb who sees s'th; gives court evidence	LWV scores for the 2 noun senses have been averaged here (grade 4 and 6).
womb	10	15	79	383	uterus	
worklessness	–	–	–	3	unemployment	UK government-speak from around 2005 meaning officially 'not currently working and disadvantaged when accessing employment'. Used by agencies adopting official language rather than thinking of their own. Those using merely 'unemployed' may expect a nocturnal knock from the style police. The word may not survive the 2010 power shift, though.
works	–	–	–	7955	various types of work in a project	Often seen in housing-association and planning documents. The singular will often do.
workstream	–	–	–	6		A particular area of work in an organization, suggesting smoothly operating and efficient departments working well together.
workmanship	8	13	72	198	skill devoted to/quality in a task/product	
worldwide	4	9	75	2199	all over the world	

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
worsen	6	11	72	710	get worse	
wrongdoer	6	11	68	48	sb who does wrong	See 'perpetrator'.
x-ray [n]	4	9	87	917	photographic image made by radiation	
X yardstick	4	9	72	196	measuring stick, standard of measurement	
Y yearly	6	11	74	435	for a year, once a year, annually	LWV gives 'annual' and 'annually' as fourth-grade words.
yield [v]	10	15	78	1479	produce or give	
zits	6	11	75	1	pimples	A well-understood word that's rarely spotted in print.
Z zone [n]	4	9	78	3640	area, region	
zone [v]	6	11	84	114	divide into areas	

Appendix A: Style note

Our use of '-ise' and '-ize'

We spell words like 'recognize', 'organize', 'sympathize', 'trivialize', 'popularize' and 'utilize' with a z. Our reasons are phonological (z representing better the sound of the suffix) and etymological (the z form correlating better with previous forms of the suffix in Greek and late Latin). The z spelling is also the first alternative given in British dictionaries for words deriving from the Greek zeta root.

Our use of words and figures

To be concise, pages 6–95 of the lexicon give all numbers as figures except as follows:

- 1 Using words for numbers that start sentences (to avoid the potentially confusing sequence of a full stop, space then figure).
- 2 Using ordinal numbers ('first', 'second', 'third' etc) as words up to 'ninth', then using figures for '10th' and upwards. Most publishers switch to figures somewhere, and our choice is where the figures double up.

On our website and elsewhere, we've experimented with writing numbers as figures because we believe it can be clearer for readers. A UK Department of Health and Social Security* study found that people prefer numbers to be in figures not words. Various bodies (such as the Singapore Land Authority, and parliamentary counsel in Australia) have followed this style for years, apparently without difficulty. However, mainly because so few organizations do this, it seems odd and distracting for us to do it, so we're now reverting to a more conventional approach on our website and in new publications. This means we'll use figures for 10 and above but words for one to nine unless units are being used, eg 9g.

Appendix B: British National Corpus Use of the British National Corpus data

The frequency figures under the 'BNC' heading include inflections (ie, noun plurals and all verb endings), and '-ise' and '-ize' spellings, but exclude comparatives and superlatives (eg, 'better', 'best').

For multi-sense items, the relative frequencies were estimated by taking a sample of 50 occurrences and counting the frequency of each sense, converting this into a percentage of the 50 occurrences and using this percentage to calculate the frequency across the whole of the corpus. For example, information for 'account' as a noun can be searched for separately from 'to account for' (the verb) by asking the corpus to bring up only nominal examples for the noun sense, and only verbal examples for the verb sense. This is done by prefixing the words with special codes, as explained on the BNC website.

However, the corpus doesn't distinguish meanings, so if there are 2 or more senses of a word with the same part of speech, eg 'afford' (afford a purchase/afford an opportunity), the corpus can only be asked for verbal instances. Then the data has to be assessed for the frequencies of the different senses. With 'afford', the corpus would be asked for afford, affords, affording and afforded.

The corpus reveals how many instances it has of each word form, and will give a sample of 50 real sentences showing its use. You need to count the number of instances of each sense and calculate the percentage of the total number of instances of that form. You then sum the 4 figures and divide by 4 to get an average frequency.

Why do some of the frequencies seem higher or lower than expected?

There are several possible reasons. For example, there's a high frequency of 'habitation' and 'judgement' in the BNC scores. This may reflect weightings in the various strands of

source texts that form the corpus.

Frequency data in any corpus will give you only a rough idea of how well a word is known, but it's far better than nothing.

Where does the corpus data come from?

The written part of the BNC (90m words) has many kinds of text including pieces from regional and national newspapers, specialist periodicals and journals for all ages and interests, academic books and popular fiction, letters and memos, and school and university essays. The spoken part (10m words) consists of transcriptions of unscripted conversations (recorded by volunteers chosen from different age-groups, regions and social classes in a demographically balanced way) and speech collected in different contexts, ranging from formal business or government meetings to radio shows and phone-ins.

Appendix C

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