

Malaprops

A malaprop is a mistaken use of a word in place of a similar-sounding one, often with an amusing effect. The term came from the eighteenth-century play *The Rivals* by Richard Sheridan. Throughout the play, Mrs. Malaprop purposely made blunders by mixing up similar sounding words for humor. From this came the new words: malaprop and malproposims.

Over time the definition of malaprop has been refined.

A malaprop must contain three features:

- The new word that replaces the original must have a different meaning.
- The substituted word must have a similar sound to the original word.
- The word used must be a recognized in the speaker's native tongue.

Americans enjoy a great joke. When famous people accidentally use incorrect words, the press loves to point them out. President George W. Bush was famous for his misuse of words. Because of this malaprops are often referred to as Bushisms. Here's a selection of George W. Bushisms:



- "We cannot let terrorists and rogue nations hold this nation hostile or hold our allies hostile."
- "We are making steadfast progress."
- "It will take time to restore chaos and order."
- "The law I sign today directs new funds... to the task of collecting vital intelligence... on weapons of mass production."

Famous People Malaprops

Complete the chart to explain the humor behind each of these malaprops.

Statement Made by Someone	Meaning of the phrase as Said	What substitution was made?
"Listen to the blabbing brook." Norm Crosby		
"Marie Scott... has really plummeted to the top." Alan Weeks		
"Well, that was a cliff-dweller." Wes Westrum, about a close baseball game		
"We seem to have unleashed a hornet's nest." Valerie Singleton		
"It's got lots of installation." Mike Smith, describing his new coat		
"Be sure and put some of those neutrons on it." Mike Smith, ordering a salad at a restaurant		
"I'm fading into Bolivian." Mike Tyson		

Famous People Malaprops Answer Key

Complete the chart to explain the humor behind each of these malprops.

Statement Made by Someone	Meaning of the phrase as Said	What substitution was made?
"Listen to the blabbing brook." Norm Crosby	Blabbing means gossiping. The brook was telling gossip.	(substituted "blabbing" for "babbling")
"Marie Scott... has really plummeted to the top." Alan Weeks	Plummet means to fall. You can fall down but not up. The statement contradicts itself.	(substituted "plummeted" for "rising")
"Well, that was a cliff-dweller." Wes Westrum, about a close baseball game	A cliff-dweller is someone who lives on cliffs. A cliff-hanger is you are left guessing the end results.	(substituted "cliff-dweller" for "cliff-hanger")
"We seem to have unleashed a hornet's nest." Valerie Singleton	Unleased is not a real word. To lease something means to rent it. When something is left unleashed it is set free.	(substituted "unleased" for "unleashed")
"It's got lots of installation." Mike Smith, describing his new coat	Installation is the process of putting equipment in position and making it ready to use. Insulation is material that keeps something warm or cold.	(substituted "installation" for "insulation")
"Be sure and put some of those neutrons on it." Mike Smith, ordering a salad at a restaurant	Neutrons are small particles that have no electrical charge. They are part of the nucleus of most atoms. Croutons are toasted cubes of bread.	(substituted "neutrons" for "croutons")
"I'm fading into Bolivian." Mike Tyson	Bolivia is a country in South America. A Bolivian is a person who lives in Bolivia. Oblivion means you are in a state of unconsciousness.	(substituted "Bolivian" for "oblivion")

Correct these malaprops.

Instructions:

Highlight the error in each sentence. In the box provided, write the word that should have been used.

Phrase Made	What substitution was made?
1. The man's prepositions was not pleasing to me.	
2. She minus whale go since she already bought tickets.	
3. Grammar and Grandpa will be coming for Thanksgiving dinner.	
4. One vegetable I love is sparrowgrass with cheese sauce.	
5. Dad says the monster is just a pigment of my imagination.	
6. I need a wheel barrel to carry these leaves I raked away.	
7. Use a heap o' tape to put your pictures in the album.	
8. I need five more to make my quotation for the month.	
9. My brother takes me for granite.	
10. He had to use a fire distinguisher.	
11. Michelangelo painted the Sixteenth Chapel.	
12. Goat head and I'll meet up with you later.	
13. He's going through an awkward phrase.	
14. I have extract change	
15. My sister has extra-century perception.	
16. She lives in an ivy tower.	
17. "Don't" is a contraption.	
18. I'll run over next store and borrow a cup of sugar.	
19. My grandmother has old timers.	
20. He's a wolf in cheap clothing.	

Correct these malaprops.

Answer Key

The man's **prepositions** was not pleasing to me. [propositions]

She **minus whale** go since she already bought tickets. [might as well]

Grammar and Grandpa will be coming for Thanksgiving dinner. [Grandma]

One vegetable I love is **sparrowgrass** with cheese sauce. [asparagus]

Dad says the monster is just a **pigment** of my imagination. [figment]

I need a **wheel barrel** to carry these leaves I raked away. [wheelbarrow]

Use a **heap o' tape** to put your pictures in the album. [adhesive tape]

I need five more to make my **quotation** for the month. [quota]

My brother takes me for **granite**. [granted]

He had to use a fire **distinguisher**. [extinguisher]

Michelangelo painted the **Sixteenth** Chapel. [Sistine]

Goat head and I'll meet up with you later. [go ahead]

He's going through an awkward **phrase**. [phase]

I have **extract** change. [exact]

My sister has **extra-century** perception. [extrasensory]

She lives in an **ivy** tower. [ivory]

"Don't" is a **contraption**. [contraction]

I'll run over next **store** and borrow a cup of sugar. [door]

My grandmother has **old timers**. [Alzheimer's]

He's a wolf in **cheap** clothing. [sheep's]