

**MIGNON** Grammar Girl here. This is an expanded show based on the original episode covering when to use affect with an A, and when to use effect with an E. This question is from Eric on the voicemail line.

**ERIC:** I have a question for you regarding the affect or effect conundrum. Please shed some light on this for me. I've read style guides, but I can never remember. So I'm looking for some kind of mnemonic or something that might help. Thank you.

**MIGNON** This is by far the most requested grammar topic. So I have a few mnemonics and a matching cartoon to help you remember. Before we get to the memory trick though, I want to explain the difference between the two words, it's actually pretty straightforward. The majority of the time, you use affect with an A as a verb, and effect with an E as a noun.

Affect with an A means to influence, as in the arrows affected aardvark, or the rain affected Amy's hairdo. Affect can also mean roughly, to act in a way that you don't feel, as in, she affected an air of superiority. Effect with an E has a lot of subtle meanings as a noun. But to me, the meaning of result seems to be at the core of all the definitions. For example, you can say, the effect was eye-popping, or the sound effects were amazing, or the rain had no effect on Amy's hairdo.

So most of the time, affect with an A is a verb, and effect with an E is a noun. There are rare instances where the roles are switched, and I'll get to those later. But for now, let's focus on the common meanings. This is quick and dirty grammar, and my impression from your questions is that most people have trouble remembering the basic rules of when to use these words. So if you stick with those, you'll be right 95% of the time.

So most of the time affect with an A is a verb, and effect with an E is a noun. And now we can get to the mnemonics. First, the mnemonic involves a very easy noun to help you remember, aardvark. Yes, if you can remember aardvark, a very easy noun, you'll always remember that affect with an A as a verb, and effect with an E is a noun. Why? Because the first letters of a very easy noun are the same first letters as an affect verb, effect noun. That's a very easy noun-- affect verb, effect noun.

But why aardvark, you ask? Because there's also an example to help you remember. It's the arrows affected aardvark. The effect was eye-popping. It should be easy to remember that

affect with an A goes with the A words, arrow and aardvark, and that effect with an E goes with the E word, eye-popping. If you can visualize the sentences, the arrows affected aardvark, the effect was eye-popping, it's pretty easy to see that affect with an A is a verb and effect with an E is a noun.

And you absolutely must go to the transcript at [quickanddirtytips.com](http://quickanddirtytips.com), even if you've never been there before, because I posted the illustration of the example from my new book. It's aardvark being affected by arrows, and I think looking at it will help you remember the example sentences. And it's cute.

So if you go to a [quickanddirtytips.com](http://quickanddirtytips.com), you can print it out and hang it by your desk. So a very easy noun will help you remember that affect with an A is a verb, and effect with an E is a noun. And the example will help you see how to use both words in a sentence.

So what about those rare meanings that don't follow the rules I just gave you? Well, affect can be used as a noun when you're talking about psychology. It means the mood that someone appears to have. For example, she displayed a happy affect. Psychologists find it useful because they know that you can never really understand what someone else is feeling. You can only know how they appear to be feeling, an affect.

And effect with an E can be used as a verb that essentially means to bring about or to accomplish. For example, you could say, aardvark hoped to effect change within the borough. But as I said, if you remember the common uses, you'll get it right most of the time.

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