Grammar Girl’s
101 Words
Every High School Graduate Needs to Know
Also by Mignon Fogarty

Grammar Girl’s Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing
The Grammar Devotional
Grammar Girl Presents the Ultimate Writing Guide for Students
Grammar Girl’s 101 Misused Words You’ll Never Confuse Again
Introduction

You may or may not have been taught these words in high school, but they’ll serve you well from here on out. Use them in your college entrance essays or during job interviews to show that you're well-read and well-spoken. Even if you’re past those stages in life, you’ll regularly see most of these words in the news.

Since there are so many words that could legitimately be included in this book, for purely organization purposes, I’ve tried to adequately represent every letter of the alphabet; to spread the words over various disciplines such as politics, science, and economics; and to include some general vocabulary terms.
Ad Hoc

Ad hoc is literally Latin meaning “for this.” We use ad hoc in English to describe something temporary, something that was created for a specific purpose or is a one-off. For example, an ad hoc decorations committee could be created for the sole purpose of organizing the prom decorations, and an ad hoc theme song meeting could be called to address the one specific issue of what theme song should be chosen. After their duties are fulfilled, the ad hoc committees disband and the ad hoc meetings adjourn.

It’s my belief that [the CIA’s] assassinations have always been ad hoc efforts, organized usually at the behest of policy-makers above the agency—and usually unsuccessful.

—Aldrich Ames, CIA officer who spied for other countries, in William Safire’s book The Right Word in the Right Place at the Right Time
Ad Hominem

Don’t worry, the whole book won’t be Latin, but the Latin ad word shows up a couple of times in important phrases. Ad hominem means “to the man” in Latin. We use it in English to describe a particular type of logical fallacy (see p. 30)—an argument that attacks the opponent’s character instead of addressing the point of the debate.

An ad hominem attack assumes that just because a person is bad (e.g., a liberal, a conservative, a puppy killer) his or her argument can hold no merit, whereas in reality, a flawed person may still have a good point.

As we all felt keenly throughout the 2010 campaigns, name-calling and ad hominem attacks do more than insult the opponent: They insult the audience, as well.

—Margaret McDonald, American columnist