

Affect / Effect

“Affect” is a verb meaning “have an influence on”: *The million-dollar donation from the industrialist did not affect my vote against the Clean Air Act.*

“Effect” is most commonly used as a noun meaning “a change or changed state occurring as a direct result of action”: *When I left the stove on, the effect was that the house filled with smoke.*

When you *affect* a situation, you have an *effect* on it.

The less common use of “effect” is as a verb meaning “to create or to carry something out”: *I’m trying to effect a change in the way we purchase widgets.*

No wonder people are confused. Note especially that the proper expression is not “take affect” but “take effect”—become effective. Hey, nobody ever said English was logical: just memorize it and get on with your life.

The stuff in your purse? Your personal *effects* (plural noun).

