

ECV02 — Confusing Words

Chapter ECV02 · CDS Grammar Level

CDS Level

✦ **How CDS Tests Confusing Words:** A pair of similar-sounding or similar-looking words is given. All four options describe *both* words — 3 options get at least one meaning wrong. You must find the option where **both** meanings are correct. This tests precision: knowing the exact meaning, not just a rough idea. This chapter covers pairs from CDS PYQs 2020–2026, military and current-affairs vocabulary, and high-probability pairs from SSC/UPSC crossover.

💡 Strategy for Confusing-Word Questions:

Step 1 — Define each word yourself before reading options.

Step 2 — Find options that are clearly wrong for *either* word and eliminate them.

Step 3 — The surviving option is correct. Do NOT let a convincing description of one word override a wrong description of the other.

PART A — CONFUSING PAIRS FROM EXAM PAPERS



Learn both words in every pair — the exact same format is used in exam questions. You will be tested on both meanings simultaneously.

A1

Pairs from Recent Exam Papers

CONFUSING PAIR

PONTOON

noun

A flat-bottomed boat or float used to support a temporary bridge; also a floating platform

The engineers laid a pontoon bridge across the river for the troops.

PLATOON

noun

A military unit of soldiers, typically 20–50 men, forming part of a company

The platoon advanced under heavy cover fire.

💡 Sound-alike trap. Pontoon = bridge/float; Platoon = military group. Both are military but completely different things.

CONFUSING PAIR

INVOKE

verb

To cite or appeal to a law, authority, or principle as a justification; to call upon for aid

He invoked Article 352 to impose emergency rule.

REVOKE

verb

To officially cancel or withdraw a law, right, agreement, or licence

The government revoked his licence after the violation.

💡 Invoke = call upon / bring into effect; Revoke = cancel / take back. Both relate to law but are opposites in direction.

CONFUSING PAIR

IMMINENT

adjective

About to happen very soon; impending; near in time

The attack was imminent — guards were on high alert.

EMINENT

adjective

Famous, respected, and distinguished in a field; outstanding

The eminent general delivered the convocation address.

💡 Imminent = happening SOON (time). Eminent = famous/distinguished (reputation). Both start with 'Im/Em' but mean entirely different things.

CONFUSING PAIR

LIABLE

adjective

Legally responsible for something; likely to be called to account; subject to a penalty

The officer was held liable for the accident.

LIBEL

noun/verb

The publication of a false statement damaging to a person's reputation; defamation in writing

The newspaper was sued for libel after printing the false report.

💡 Liable = legal responsibility; Libel = false written defamation. Remember: liaBLE = responsibility; liBEL = written BE-smirching.

CONFUSING PAIR

INCREDIBLE

adjective

Difficult or impossible to believe; extraordinary in degree

The commando's feat of endurance was incredible.

INCREDULOUS

adjective

Not willing or not able to believe something; showing disbelief

He was incredulous when told he had been promoted.

💡 Incredible = the THING is unbelievable; Incredulous = the PERSON refuses to believe. Rule: '-ous' describes the person's feeling; '-ible' describes the thing.

CLIMATIC*adjective*

Relating to climate; pertaining to the long-term weather conditions of a region

The climatic conditions in Siachen are extreme.

CLIMACTIC*adjective*

Relating to a climax; forming the most exciting or important part of a story or event

The battle was the climactic moment of the campaign.

💡 *Climatic = about climate/weather (clima). Climactic = about the climax/peak. One extra letter 'c' changes everything.*

A2

Pairs from Earlier Exam Papers

CONFUSING PAIR

DISCREET*adjective*

Careful and circumspect in speech and action; avoiding attention; tactful

A good intelligence officer must be discreet about sources.

DISCRETE*adjective*

Individually separate and distinct; not continuous or connected

The operation had three discrete phases, each independent.

💡 *Discreet = tactful/careful (secret). Discrete = separate/distinct. Tip: in disCREET, the two 'E's are together (keeping secrets together); in disCRETE, the 'E's are separated.*

CONFUSING PAIR

ELICIT*verb*

To draw out or provoke a response, reaction, or information

The interrogator struggled to elicit any information from the prisoner.

ILLICIT*adjective*

Forbidden by law, rules, or custom; illegal or unlicensed

They uncovered an illicit arms cache near the border.

💡 *Elicit = draw out (verb). Illicit = illegal (adjective). Elicit has no double-L; iLLicit has double-L like iLLegal.*

CONFUSING PAIR

FLAUNT*verb*

To display ostentatiously; to show off; to parade something proudly

He flaunted his medals at every gathering.

FLOUT*verb*

To openly disregard a rule or convention; to treat with contempt

The recruit openly flouted the dress code.

💡 *Flaunt = show OFF. Flout = break rules. One of the most confused pairs in formal English.*

CONFUSING PAIR**MORAL**

adjective/noun

Concerned with the principles of right and wrong; a lesson derived from a story or experience

The story carried a strong moral: discipline wins battles.

MORALE

noun

The confidence, enthusiasm, and discipline of a person or group at a particular time

The victory boosted the morale of the troops enormously.

💡 *Moral = ethics or lesson. Morale = spirit/confidence of a group (army morale, team morale). Morale ends with 'e' from the French.*

CONFUSING PAIR**PRESCRIBE**

verb

To recommend or authorise the use of (medicine); to lay down rules

The doctor prescribed complete rest for three weeks.

PROSCRIBE

verb

To officially forbid or ban; to condemn or prohibit by law

The organisation was proscribed after the attack.

💡 *Prescribe = recommend/allow. Proscribe = ban/forbid. Pro- sounds positive but means the opposite here. Remember: PROscribe = PROhibit.*

CONFUSING PAIR**PERSECUTE**

verb

To subject to hostility, ill-treatment, or harassment, especially because of religion, race, or beliefs

Minorities were persecuted during the conflict.

PROSECUTE

verb

To conduct legal proceedings against someone; to institute criminal charges

He was prosecuted for espionage.

💡 *Persecute = harass/oppress (no legal process needed). Prosecute = take to court (legal process). Per = through (ongoing harm); Pro = before (before a court).*

CONFUSING PAIR**PRINCIPAL**

adjective/noun

First in order of importance; the head of a school or organisation; a sum of money lent

The principal objective of the mission was neutralisation of the target.

PRINCIPLE

noun

A fundamental truth, law, or doctrine that serves as a basis for reasoning or behaviour

He refused to compromise on his principles.

💡 *Principal = the MAIN thing / head person (noun or adj). Principle = a rule or belief (noun only). Tip: principAL — the PAL who runs the school; princiPLE — a RULE (both end in 'le').*

CONFUSING PAIR**COMPLEMENT****COMPLIMENT**

verb/noun

Something that completes or enhances something else; to complete or make perfect

The artillery complement the infantry's ground assault.

verb/noun

A polite expression of praise or admiration; to say something flattering

The General paid the battalion a compliment on their discipline.

💡 *Complement = completes (compl-E-ment = the E of completE). Compliment = praise (compl-I-ment = I like you). The vowel is the key.*

CONFUSING PAIR

CONTEMPTIBLE

adjective

Deserving contempt; despicable; worthy of being looked down upon

His cowardly behaviour was contemptible.

CONTEMPTUOUS

adjective

Showing contempt; expressing disdain or disrespect toward someone

He gave a contemptuous look at the accusation.

💡 *Contemptible = THE THING deserves contempt (pitiable, despicable). Contemptuous = THE PERSON shows contempt (arrogant, disdainful). Rule: '-ible' = deserving it; '-ous' = feeling/showing it.*

CONFUSING PAIR

INGENIOUS

adjective

Clever, inventive, and resourceful; showing creative brilliance in design or plan

The colonel devised an ingenious plan to outflank the enemy.

INGENUOUS

adjective

Innocent, naive, and candid; without guile or deception; artlessly simple

The young recruit was ingenuous enough to believe every rumour.

💡 *Ingenious = brilliantly clever. Ingenuous = naive/innocent. Root difference: ingen = talent (genius); ingenu = natural/unaffected.*

CONFUSING PAIR

ALTERNATE

adjective/verb

Every other (one); to happen or occur by turns; a substitute

The patrols operated on alternate days.

ALTERNATIVE

adjective/noun

A choice between two or more possibilities; offering a different option

The officer proposed an alternative route.

💡 *Alternate = every other / by turns. Alternative = a different option/choice. Common misuse: 'I have no alternate' should be 'I have no alternative'.*

EXAM Q

Part A — Exam-Pattern Questions

Q1. Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Pontoon and Platoon

- (a) Pontoon means a wooden platform and Platoon means a bamboo structure
- (b) Pontoon means a group of soldiers and Platoon means a series of bunkers
- (c) Pontoon means a temporary bridge and Platoon means a group of soldiers**
- (d) Pontoon means a group of people and Platoon means a temporary bridge

Answer: (c) Pontoon means a temporary bridge and Platoon means a group of soldiers

- (a) Wrong: pontoon is a floating bridge/boat, not wooden platform; platoon is not bamboo. (b) Wrong: pontoon is not a group of soldiers — that reverses the meanings.
- (d) Wrong: reverses both meanings entirely. **(c) Correct:** Pontoon = temporary floating bridge; Platoon = a military unit (group of soldiers, ~20–50 men).

Q2. Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Invoke and Revoke

- (a) Invoke means to invite trouble and Revoke means to repay debts
- (b) Invoke means to use the law to achieve something and Revoke means to officially cancel permission or agreement**
- (c) Invoke means to use the law and Revoke means to ignore legal procedures
- (d) Invoke means to usher newness and Revoke means to stick to tradition

Answer: (b) Invoke = use law to achieve; Revoke = officially cancel

- (a) Wrong: completely incorrect meanings for both. (c) Wrong: Revoke = officially cancel, not ignore legal procedures. (d) Wrong: neither meaning is correct. **(b) Correct:** Invoke = to call upon or cite law/authority to achieve something; Revoke = to officially withdraw or cancel a permission, licence, or agreement.

Q3. Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Imminent and Eminent

- (a) Imminent means immobile and Eminent means extremely large
- (b) Imminent means extremely large and Eminent means immobile
- (c) Imminent means famous and respected and Eminent means happening soon
- (d) Imminent means happening soon and Eminent means famous and respected**

Answer: (d) Imminent = happening soon; Eminent = famous and respected

- (a) Wrong: neither meaning is correct. (b) Wrong: reverses plausible-sounding definitions. (c) Wrong: swaps the two definitions. **(d) Correct:** Imminent = about to

happen very soon (the attack is imminent); Eminent = famous, distinguished, and respected in one's field (an eminent general).

Q4. Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Incredible and Incredulous

(a) Incredible means impossible to understand and Incredulous means extremely grateful

(b) Incredible means difficult to believe and Incredulous means not willing to believe something

(c) Incredible means not willing to believe and Incredulous means difficult to believe

(d) Incredible means extremely grateful and Incredulous means impossible to understand something

Answer: (b) Incredible = difficult to believe; Incredulous = not willing to believe

(a) Wrong: neither meaning is correct. (c) Wrong: swaps the two definitions. (d)

Wrong: incorrect for both. **(b) Correct:** Incredible = the thing itself is

unbelievable/extraordinary; Incredulous = the person is unwilling or unable to believe

(an incredulous look = a look of disbelief).

Q5. Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Discreet and Discrete

(a) Discreet means openly sharing information and Discrete means connected together

(b) Discreet means careful and tactful in behaviour and Discrete means individually separate and distinct

(c) Discreet means separately distinct and Discrete means careful in speech

(d) Discreet means secret and Discrete means illegal

Answer: (b) Discreet = careful and tactful; Discrete = separately distinct

(a) Wrong: both meanings incorrect. (c) Wrong: swaps the two definitions. (d) Wrong:

Discrete is not illegal (that's 'illicit'). **(b) Correct:** Discreet = careful, tactful, avoiding

embarrassment; Discrete = separate, independent, not overlapping. The two 'E's in

discrEEt are together (keeping secrets close); in discretÉ, the e is alone (separate).

Q6. Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Flaunt and Flout

(a) Flaunt means to show off and Flout means to openly disregard rules

(b) Flaunt means to break rules and Flout means to display proudly

(c) Flaunt means to obey rules proudly and Flout means to hide one's abilities

(d) Flaunt means to ignore rules and Flout means to display emotions

Answer: (a) Flaunt = show off; Flout = openly disregard rules

(b) Wrong: swaps both meanings. (c) Wrong: both incorrect. (d) Wrong: both definitions confused. **(a) Correct:** Flaunt = to display ostentatiously, to show off (flaunt your wealth); Flout = to openly break or disregard a rule or convention with contempt (flout the regulations). These two are among the most commonly confused words in formal English.

PART B — ADVANCED CDS-LEVEL CONFUSING PAIRS

B1

High-Difficulty General Vocabulary Pairs



These pairs are at high exam difficulty. They appear across CDS, NDA, CAPF, and UPSC papers. Master both words in each pair.

VOCAB PAIR

AVERSE

adjective

Having a strong dislike or opposition to something; strongly opposed

The commander was averse to unnecessary risk.

ADVERSE

adjective

Preventing success; harmful; unfavourable; going against

Adverse weather conditions delayed the aerial mission.

💡 *Averse = YOU dislike/oppose something (personal feeling). Adverse = the situation/condition is against you (external). A person is averse; conditions are adverse.*

VOCAB PAIR

ALLUSION

noun

An indirect or passing reference to something; a hint without explicit mention

His speech made allusions to the partition tragedy.

ILLUSION

noun

A false impression or perception; something that deceives the senses or mind

The desert heat created an illusion of water on the road.

💡 *Allusion = a LITERARY reference (indirect mention). Illusion = a FALSE perception. Bonus: Delusion = a FALSE belief held despite evidence.*

VOCAB PAIR**VENAL***adjective*

Open to bribery; willing to act dishonestly for money or personal gain; corrupt

Venal officials had compromised the intelligence network.

VENIAL*adjective*

(Of a sin or fault) pardonable; minor; easily excused; not seriously wrong

The court considered it a venial offence, not a grave crime.

💡 *Venal = corruptly mercenary (bribery). Venial = forgivable/minor (ecclesiastical/legal). Venal = unforgivably corrupt; Venial = forgivably minor.*

VOCAB PAIR**LUXURIANT***adjective*

Rich and profuse in growth; lush; growing densely and abundantly

The valley was covered in luxuriant vegetation after the monsoon.

LUXURIOUS*adjective*

Extremely comfortable, elegant, and involving great expense; of luxury

The general's quarters were luxurious compared to field conditions.

💡 *Luxuriant = growing abundantly (plants/hair). Luxurious = involving luxury/comfort (living). One describes growth; one describes comfort.*

VOCAB PAIR**TORTUOUS***adjective*

Full of twists and turns; excessively complex and difficult to follow

The mountain road was tortuous, with hairpin bends at every turn.

TORTUROUS*adjective*

Causing severe pain, suffering, or anguish; extremely unpleasant

The three-day march was torturous in the summer heat.

💡 *Tortuous = twisting/winding/complex. Torturous = causing torture/pain. Both come from Latin 'torquere' (to twist) but diverged in meaning.*

VOCAB PAIR**JUDICIAL***adjective*

Of, by, or appropriate to a court or judge; relating to the administration of justice

A judicial inquiry was ordered into the procurement scandal.

JUDICIOUS*adjective*

Having, showing, or done with good judgement; wise and sensible

A judicious use of resources can win a battle without bloodshed.

💡 *Judicial = relating to COURTS/JUDGES. Judicious = wise JUDGEMENT. Judicial is institutional; judicious is personal wisdom.*

VOCAB PAIR**HISTORIC***adjective***HISTORICAL***adjective*

Famous or important in history; momentous;
likely to be remembered

The Simla Agreement was a historic accord.

Of or concerning history; concerning past
events; used in study of the past

*The museum has an extensive historical record of
the 1971 war.*

💡 *Historic = IMPORTANT in history (this is a historic moment). Historical = relating TO history (a historical account). Historic = worth recording; Historical = already recorded.*

VOCAB PAIR

PRECIPITATE

adjective/verb

(adj) Done hastily, without thought; (verb) to
cause something to happen suddenly

*A precipitate retreat caused heavy losses. / The
assassination precipitated the war.*

PRECIPITOUS

adjective

Dangerously steep; or (of action) done without
thought or care

*The precipitous cliffs made a flanking movement
impossible.*

💡 *Precipitate = causing sudden action (verb) or hasty (adj). Precipitous = dangerously STEEP (primarily).
Precipitous cliff = steep cliff; Precipitate action = hasty action.*

VOCAB PAIR

PERFUNCTORY

adjective

Carried out with minimum effort; routine and
superficial; lacking care

*The inspection was perfunctory — no one even
checked the armoury.*

PEREMPTORY

adjective

Leaving no opportunity for refusal or denial;
brusquely authoritative; imperious

*He issued a peremptory order that brooked no
argument.*

💡 *Perfunctory = going through motions without effort. Peremptory = brooking no argument (commanding). Both
describe manner but one is lazy; the other is commanding.*

VOCAB PAIR

DEPRECATE

verb

To express disapproval of; to strongly criticise; to
belittle or disparage

The officer deprecated any form of indiscipline.

DEPRECIATE

verb

To diminish in value over time; to underestimate
the worth of something

*Military equipment depreciates rapidly with heavy
use.*

💡 *Deprecate = disapprove of (verbal action). Depreciate = lose VALUE (financial). Self-deprecating humour =
modest self-criticism; depreciation of assets = financial decrease.*

VOCAB PAIR

CONTINUOUS

adjective

Unbroken; without any interruption or pause;
happening constantly

*The continuous artillery fire kept the enemy pinned
down.*

CONTINUAL

adjective

Recurring regularly or frequently; happening
repeatedly but with breaks

Continual interruptions made the briefing chaotic.

💡 *Continuous = NO breaks (one unbroken flow). Continual = WITH breaks (repeated). Continuous rain = never stops; Continual rain = keeps coming back.*

VOCAB PAIR

SENSUAL

adjective

Of or arousing gratification of the senses and physical needs; relating to physical pleasure

The luxuriant sensual pleasure of the warm meal after weeks in field.

SENSUOUS

adjective

Relating to or affecting the senses in an aesthetic way; pleasing to the senses

The sensuous beauty of the Himalayan landscape inspired the artist.

💡 *Sensual = physical/bodily pleasure (often with sexual undertone). Sensuous = pleasing to the SENSES aesthetically. Poetry is sensuous; appetite is sensual.*

VOCAB PAIR

APPRISE

verb

To inform or notify someone; to give notice to

The CO was apprised of the situation within the hour.

APPRAISE

verb

To assess the value, quality, or nature of something; to evaluate

The surveyor appraised the structural damage to the forward base.

💡 *Apprise = INFORM someone (tell them). Appraise = EVALUATE something (assess it). Keep them apart: appriSE = notifY someone; appraiSE = assess valuE.*

VOCAB PAIR

CORROBORATE

verb

To confirm or give support to a statement or theory; to strengthen by additional evidence

The second witness corroborated the officer's account.

COLLABORATE

verb

To work jointly on an activity or project; to cooperate with an enemy occupier

The two units collaborated to secure the ridge.

💡 *Corroborate = provide PROOF/evidence. Collaborate = WORK together. One confirms facts; one joins efforts.*

VOCAB PAIR

OBSEQUIOUS

adjective

Excessively eager to please or serve; servile; fawning

The obsequious aide agreed with every word the General said.

OBSEQUIES

noun (plural)

Funeral rites and ceremonies

The obsequies were held with full military honours.

💡 *Obsequious = sycophantic/flattering (adj). Obsequies = funeral ceremonies (noun). Same root but entirely different meanings. Obsequious person buries their dignity; obsequies bury the dead.*

PRACTICE

CDS–Pattern Questions — Advanced Pairs

Q7. (CDS Pattern) Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Venal and Venial

- (a) Venal means forgivable and Venial means corrupt and open to bribery
- (b) Venal means rare and Venial means common

(c) Venal means open to bribery and Venial means pardonable or minor

- (d) Venal means punishable and Venial means praised by all

Answer: (c) Venal = open to bribery; Venial = pardonable or minor

(a) Wrong: swaps both definitions. (b) Wrong: both incorrect. (d) Wrong: both incorrect. **(c) Correct:** Venal = corruptly open to bribery (a venal politician); Venial = minor and forgivable (a venial error). Context: in law and theology, venial means lesser/pardonable, as opposed to mortal.

Q8. (CDS Pattern) Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Judicial and Judicious

- (a) Judicial means wise and sensible and Judicious means relating to courts

(b) Judicial means relating to a court or judge and Judicious means showing good judgement

- (c) Judicial means corrupt and Judicious means law-abiding
- (d) Judicial means experienced and Judicious means new to service

Answer: (b) Judicial = relating to courts; Judicious = showing good judgement

(a) Wrong: swaps the two definitions. (c) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. (d) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. **(b) Correct:** Judicial = institutional/formal (a judicial inquiry, the judicial system); Judicious = personal wisdom/prudence (a judicious choice, a judicious commander). Both relate to 'judge' but one is the system, the other is the quality.

Q9. (CDS Pattern) Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Precipitate and Precipitous

- (a) Precipitate means steep and Precipitous means hasty

(b) Precipitate means wise and Precipitous means foolish

(c) Precipitate means hasty or causing sudden action and Precipitous means dangerously steep

(d) Precipitate means slow and deliberate and Precipitous means level ground

Answer: (c) Precipitate = hasty / causing sudden action; Precipitous = dangerously steep

(a) Wrong: swaps the two definitions. (b) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. (d) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. **(c) Correct:** Precipitate (adj) = done hastily without thought; Precipitate (verb) = to cause something to happen suddenly; Precipitous = dangerously steep (a precipitous drop). In common use: a precipitous cliff face; a precipitate action.

Q10. (CDS Pattern) Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Apprise and Appraise

(a) Apprise means to evaluate and Appraise means to inform

(b) Apprise means to appreciate and Appraise means to feel sorry for

(c) Apprise means to inform and Appraise means to evaluate

(d) Apprise means to refuse and Appraise means to agree

Answer: (c) Apprise = inform; Appraise = evaluate

(a) Wrong: swaps the two definitions. (b) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. (d) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. **(c) Correct:** Apprise = to notify or inform (the CO was apprised of the situation); Appraise = to assess or evaluate (appraise the damage, appraise a property). The CO is apprised; the situation is appraised.

PART C – MILITARY & CURRENT AFFAIRS CONFUSING WORDS



These pairs are directly relevant to military vocabulary, defence news, and current affairs. Candidates are expected to know precise military terminology.

C1

Military Vocabulary – Easily Confused

MILITARY

MARTIAL

adjective

MARSHAL

noun/verb

Of or appropriate to war; warlike; relating to the armed forces or combat

Martial law was declared in the border districts.

A high-ranking military officer (Field Marshal); to assemble or arrange in order

The Field Marshal inspected the parade. / He marshalled his troops for the assault.

💡 *Martial = WARLIKE/military (adj). Marshal = senior RANK or to organise (noun/verb). Martial law uses martial; Field Marshal uses marshal.*

MILITARY

ORDNANCE

noun

Military weapons and ammunition; the branch dealing with weapons and supplies

The ordnance depot held stockpiles of artillery shells.

ORDINANCE

noun

An authoritative order or law issued by a government or authority

The President promulgated an ordinance to fill the legislative gap.

💡 *Ordnance = military WEAPONS/explosives (from French 'ordenance'). Ordinance = a LAW or order. Ordnance Survey maps terrain; Ordinances govern conduct.*

MILITARY

CORPS

noun

A military unit, typically larger than a division; a body of troops with a specific function

The Army Medical Corps provided critical support during the operation.

CORPSE

noun

A dead body, especially of a human being

The forensic team examined the corpse.

💡 *Corps = military UNIT (pronounced 'core'). Corpse = DEAD body (the 'p' and 'e' are silent). The pronunciation difference is critical: 'core' vs 'corpse'.*

MILITARY

GARRISON

noun/verb

A body of troops stationed in a town or fort; to station troops at a particular place

The garrison at Srinagar was on high alert after the incident.

GUERRILLA

noun/adjective

A member of an irregular military force fighting a stronger force; relating to such warfare

Guerrilla tactics were employed to harass the convoy.

💡 *Garrison = STATIONED troops (regular, fixed). Guerrilla = IRREGULAR fighter (mobile, hit-and-run). Garrison defends; guerrilla attacks unconventionally.*

MILITARY

RECONNAISSANCE

noun

Military observation of a region to gather information about an enemy; survey

A reconnaissance mission was launched before the main assault.

RENAISSANCE

noun

A revival of interest in art, literature, and learning; a period of renewed cultural interest

The regiment's cultural renaissance began after the new CO arrived.

💡 *Reconnaissance = military SURVEY/scouting (recce). Renaissance = cultural REVIVAL (French: rebirth). Only the first four letters differ but the meanings are worlds apart.*

MILITARY

SORTIE

noun

An attack made by troops coming out of a besieged place; a flight made by a single aircraft on a mission

The IAF flew over 200 sorties during the operation.

SORDID

adjective

Involving immoral or dishonest activities; dirty and squalid

The inquiry revealed a sordid tale of corruption.

💡 *Sortie = military MISSION/flight (heroic). Sordid = dirty/immoral (negative). Sortie comes from French 'sortir' (to go out); sordid from Latin 'sordidus' (dirty).*

MILITARY

FORTITUDE

noun

Courage and endurance in the face of pain or adversity; mental strength

The POW showed remarkable fortitude throughout his captivity.

FORTIFICATION

noun

A military construction or earthwork designed to strengthen a position; a defensive structure

The fortifications along the Line of Control were reinforced.

💡 *Fortitude = inner COURAGE/strength (personal quality). Fortification = physical DEFENSIVE structure (built object). Same root 'fortis' (strong) but one is mental, one is physical.*

MILITARY

RAMPART

noun

A defensive wall of a castle or town; a broad embankment for defence

Soldiers lined the ramparts of the ancient fort.

RAMPANT

adjective

Occurring without restraint; widespread and uncontrollable; flourishing excessively

Corruption was rampant in the procurement division.

💡 *Rampart = defensive WALL (military). Rampant = out of CONTROL / unrestrained (adjective). Same root sound but one is a noun (structure), one is an adjective (condition).*

CURRENT AFFAIRS

INSURGENT

noun/adjective

A person who rises in active revolt against a government or authority; relating to rebellion

Insurgents attacked the supply convoy in the valley.

RESURGENT

adjective

Increasing or reviving after a period of little activity; rising again

A resurgent Taliban posed renewed challenges after the withdrawal.

💡 *Insurgent = one who REBELS against authority. Resurgent = RISING AGAIN after a decline. Both contain 'surge' but one is about rebellion; one is about revival.*

CEASEFIRE

noun

A temporary suspension of fighting; a truce; agreed halt to hostilities

A ceasefire was announced along the LoC after the escalation.

ARMISTICE

noun

A formal agreement to stop fighting; an agreed end to war (more permanent than ceasefire)

The Armistice of 1918 ended World War I.

💡 *Ceasefire = temporary/tactical HALT to fighting. Armistice = formal AGREEMENT to end war (more lasting). Ceasefire = stop shooting; Armistice = sign the papers.*

MILITARY**MERCENARY**

noun/adjective

A soldier who fights for money rather than loyalty; motivated primarily by personal gain

The warlord hired mercenaries from several countries.

MISSIONARY

noun/adjective

One sent on a mission, especially to spread religious beliefs; relating to such work

The missionary worked in tribal areas for decades.

💡 *Mercenary = motivated by MONEY (soldier for hire). Missionary = motivated by BELIEF/mission (spreads faith). Both may enter conflict zones but for opposite reasons.*

CURRENT AFFAIRS**PERPETRATE**

verb

To carry out or commit (a crime, error, or harmful act)

The terror attack was perpetrated by a banned organisation.

PERPETUATE

verb

To cause something to continue indefinitely; to preserve or maintain forever

Such policies perpetuate inequality across generations.

💡 *Perpetrate = COMMIT an act (crime). Perpetuate = make something CONTINUE forever. Perpetrator commits the crime; perpetuation keeps a situation going.*

CURRENT AFFAIRS**CENSURE**

verb/noun

To express severe disapproval officially; a formal expression of strong condemnation

The officer faced censure from the court martial.

CENSOR

noun/verb

An official who examines material and removes parts deemed objectionable; to suppress

Wartime communications were censored to prevent intelligence leaks.

💡 *Censure = CRITICISE/condemn (official disapproval). Censor = CUT/suppress content (control information). Censure = verbal punishment; Censor = informational control.*

Q11. (CDS Pattern) Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Ordnance and Ordinance

(a) Ordnance means a law or regulation and Ordinance means military weapons

(b) Ordnance means military weapons and Ordinance means a law or authoritative order

(c) Ordnance means a type of food supply and Ordinance means a religious practice

(d) Ordnance means a rank in the army and Ordinance means a type of weapon

Answer: (b) Ordnance = military weapons; Ordinance = a law or order

(a) Wrong: swaps both definitions. (c) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. (d) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. **(b) Correct:** Ordnance = military weapons, explosives, and ammunition (Ordnance Corps, ordnance depot); Ordinance = an authoritative order, rule, or law (Presidential Ordinance, municipal ordinance). The extra 'i' in ordinance makes it a law, not a weapon.

Q12. (CDS Pattern) Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Martial and Marshal

(a) Martial means a high rank and Marshal means relating to war

(b) Martial means relating to war and Marshal means a high-ranking officer or to arrange in order

(c) Martial means forbidden and Marshal means allowed

(d) Martial means brave and Marshal means cowardly

Answer: (b) Martial = relating to war; Marshal = high rank or to organise

(a) Wrong: swaps both definitions. (c) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. (d) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. **(b) Correct:** Martial = of or relating to war/the armed forces (martial arts, martial law, court martial); Marshal = a high-ranking officer (Field Marshal) OR to gather and arrange troops or resources (marshal forces, marshal evidence).

Q13. (CDS Pattern) Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Reconnaissance and Renaissance

(a) Reconnaissance means a cultural revival and Renaissance means a military survey

(b) Reconnaissance means a military survey and Renaissance means a cultural revival

(c) Reconnaissance means a type of weapon and Renaissance means a type of map

(d) Reconnaissance means an agreement and Renaissance means a disagreement

Answer: (b) Reconnaissance = military survey; Renaissance = cultural revival

(a) Wrong: swaps both definitions. (c) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. (d) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. **(b) Correct:** Reconnaissance (recce) = military observation and survey of an area before an operation; Renaissance = a period of renewed cultural and intellectual interest (literally 'rebirth' in French). The first four letters are the same ('rena') but the words belong to entirely different domains.

Q14. (CDS Pattern) Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Fortitude and Fortification

(a) Fortitude means a defensive wall and Fortification means inner courage

(b) Fortitude means inner courage and endurance and Fortification means a defensive military structure

(c) Fortitude means a military rank and Fortification means a ceremony

(d) Fortitude means weakness and Fortification means strength of character

Answer: (b) Fortitude = inner courage; Fortification = defensive structure

(a) Wrong: swaps both definitions. (c) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. (d) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. **(b) Correct:** Fortitude = mental and moral strength in adversity (personal, internal quality); Fortification = a wall, earthwork, or other structure built to defend a position (physical, external structure). Same root 'fortis' (strong) – one is psychological strength, one is architectural strength.

PART D – SCIENCE, LEGAL & ADMINISTRATIVE CONFUSING PAIRS

D1

Legal & Administrative Pairs



These pairs appear in Spotting Errors and comprehension passages relating to governance, law, and public affairs – core themes in the exam.

LEGAL/ADMIN

BIENNIAL

adjective

Occurring twice a year; semi-annual

The biennial inspection covered both winter and summer quarters.

BIENNIAL

adjective

Occurring every two years; lasting for two years

The biennial defence exhibition draws participants from 50 countries.

💡 *Biannual = TWICE a year (bi + annual). Biennial = every TWO years (bi + ennial). The extra syllable 'enn' = years (as in millennium). This pair is notorious for confusion in military scheduling.*

LEGAL/ADMIN

COUNSEL

noun/verb

Legal advice; a legal adviser or barrister; to advise or recommend

Defence counsel cross-examined the witness for three hours.

COUNCIL

noun

An advisory, deliberative, or administrative body of people

The National Security Council reviewed the intelligence report.

💡 *Counsel = legal ADVICE/lawyer. Council = BODY of people (committee). Counsel counsels individuals; Council governs groups. Security Council, War Council = group; Defence Counsel = lawyer.*

LEGAL/ADMIN

CAPITAL

noun/adjective

The city or town that serves as the seat of government; money or assets; punishable by death; most important

New Delhi is the capital of India. / Capital punishment is a contentious issue.

CAPITOL

noun

A building in which a state legislature meets; specifically the US Capitol building

Protestors stormed the Capitol in January 2021.

💡 *Capital = CITY (New Delhi) or money or adjective (capital punishment). Capitol = a specific BUILDING where legislature meets (US Capitol, state capitols). Capitol is always a physical building.*

LEGAL/ADMIN

ENVELOP

verb

To wrap up, surround, or cover completely; to enclose or encase

Fog enveloped the mountain peaks, reducing visibility to zero.

ENVELOPE

noun

A flat paper container for a letter or document; a covering layer

The sealed envelope contained the classified briefing.

💡 *Envelop (verb) = to SURROUND completely (fog envelops). Envelope (noun) = the paper CONTAINER (letter envelope). Verb has no 'e' at the end; noun does.*

LEGAL/ADMIN

WAVER

verb

To become unsteady; to be uncertain; to show hesitation in commitment or direction

His resolve never wavered, even under extreme pressure.

WAIVER

noun

An act of voluntarily relinquishing a right or claim; an official document to this effect

He signed a waiver before participating in the high-risk exercise.

💡 *Waver = to HESITATE/be unsteady (verb). Waiver = legal document giving UP a right (noun). One is a mental state; one is a legal document.*

LEGAL/ADMIN

DIFFUSE

verb/adjective

(verb) To spread widely or thin; (adjective) spread out, not concentrated, verbose

Smoke diffused through the ventilation system. / His report was diffuse and hard to follow.

DEFUSE

verb

To remove the fuse from a bomb; to reduce tension or danger in a situation

Negotiators worked to defuse the hostage crisis.

💡 *Diffuse = SPREAD widely (di = apart). Defuse = REMOVE danger (de = away from). A bomb is defused; gas is diffused. Very common error in security/military writing.*

LEGAL/ADMIN

MILITATE

verb

To be a powerful factor in preventing or making something occur; to work against

The poor intelligence militated against the success of the mission.

MITIGATE

verb

To make less severe, serious, or painful; to lessen the impact

Good training mitigated the risks of the hazardous operation.

💡 *Militate = to WORK AGAINST or for (factor that militates against success). Mitigate = to REDUCE/lessen. Both start with 'mi' but one introduces opposition; one reduces harm.*

D2

Science & Medical Administrative Pairs



These pairs appear in comprehension passages on science, health policy, and environmental issues in CDS papers.

SCIENCE/MEDICAL

ENDEMIC

adjective/noun

Regularly found in a particular place or population; native to a specific region

Malaria remains endemic in several districts of the Andamans.

EPIDEMIC

noun/adjective

A widespread occurrence of an infectious disease in a community at a particular time

A cholera epidemic broke out in the flood-affected areas.

💡 *Endemic = ALWAYS PRESENT in a region (localised). Epidemic = SUDDEN WIDESPREAD outbreak. Pandemic = global outbreak. Sequence: endemic → epidemic → pandemic.*

SCIENCE/MEDICAL

EMACIATED

EMANCIPATED

adjective

Abnormally thin and weak, especially through starvation or illness

The POWs were emaciated after months of captivity.

adjective

Set free from legal, social, or political restrictions; liberated

The emancipated soldiers returned to civilian life after decades.

💡 *Emaciated = extremely THIN (physical state from deprivation). Emancipated = SET FREE (political/social freedom). Sound-alike trap: emaciated describes a body; emancipated describes a legal status.*

SCIENCE/MEDICAL

ACETIC

adjective

Relating to acetic acid (vinegar); having the properties of vinegar

Acetic acid is the main component of vinegar.

ASCETIC

noun/adjective

A person who practises severe self-discipline and abstains from indulgence; relating to asceticism

The ascetic monk lived on minimal food and water.

💡 *Acetic = relating to VINEGAR/acid (chemistry). Ascetic = practising self-denial (lifestyle/philosophy). Both adjectives but one is chemical; one is philosophical.*

SCIENCE/MEDICAL

BIOTIC

adjective

Relating to living organisms; of or produced by living things

Biotic factors include all living components of an ecosystem.

ABIOTIC

adjective

Relating to non-living physical and chemical elements of the environment

Temperature and rainfall are abiotic factors in an ecosystem.

💡 *Biotic = LIVING components (plants, animals, bacteria). Abiotic = NON-LIVING components (water, sunlight, minerals). Prefix 'a-' = without/not.*

PRACTICE

Part D — Legal, Admin & Science Pairs

Q15. (CDS Pattern) Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Biannual and Biennial

- (a) Biannual means every two years and Biennial means twice a year
- (b) Biannual means twice a year and Biennial means every two years**
- (c) Biannual means every two months and Biennial means every two weeks
- (d) Biannual means annually and Biennial means once a decade

Answer: (b) Biannual = twice a year; Biennial = every two years

(a) Wrong: swaps both definitions. (c) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. (d) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. **(b) Correct:** Biannual = occurring twice a year (bi + annual)

= two times per year); Biennial = occurring every two years (bi + ennial, where 'ennial' relates to years — as in perennial, centennial). The National Defence Academy conducts biannual selections; the Defexpo India is a biennial event.

Q16. (CDS Pattern) Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Diffuse and Defuse

(a) Diffuse means to neutralise a bomb and Defuse means to spread widely

(b) Diffuse means to spread and Defuse means to remove a threat or tension

(c) Diffuse means to concentrate and Defuse means to separate

(d) Diffuse means to accelerate and Defuse means to slow down

Answer: (b) Diffuse = to spread widely; Defuse = to remove a threat

(a) Wrong: swaps both definitions. (c) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. (d) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. **(b) Correct:** Diffuse (verb) = to spread widely or scatter (smoke diffuses; light diffuses; responsibility is diffused). Defuse (verb) = to make a bomb or tense situation safe (defuse a bomb; defuse the crisis). One spreads something; one removes danger.

Q17. (CDS Pattern) Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Endemic and Epidemic

(a) Endemic means a disease spreading globally and Epidemic means a disease found only in animals

(b) Endemic means regularly present in a region and Epidemic means a widespread outbreak of disease

(c) Endemic means widespread globally and Epidemic means permanently absent from a region

(d) Endemic means a viral infection and Epidemic means a bacterial infection

Answer: (b) Endemic = regularly present in a region; Epidemic = widespread outbreak

(a) Wrong: global spread = pandemic, not endemic; animal disease ≠ epidemic. (c)

Wrong: reverses and misdefines both. (d) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. **(b)**

Correct: Endemic = constantly present and characteristic of a particular region or population (malaria is endemic to tropical zones); Epidemic = a sudden widespread occurrence of a disease in a community (a cholera epidemic).

Q18. (CDS Pattern) Select the option that most appropriately describes the meaning of both words: Counsel and Council

(a) Counsel means a group of officials and Council means legal advice

(b) Counsel means legal advice or an adviser and Council means an official deliberative body

(c) Counsel means to dismiss and Council means to appoint

(d) Counsel means a type of weapon and Council means a type of rank

Answer: (b) Counsel = legal advice/adviser; Council = official deliberative body

(a) Wrong: swaps both definitions. (c) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. (d) Wrong: both definitions incorrect. **(b) Correct:** Counsel = advice (especially legal), or the lawyer/adviser giving it (defence counsel, king's counsel); Council = an organised group with authority (National Security Council, Municipal Council, War Council). Remember: Counsel counsels; Council convenes.

Quick Reference – Confusing Words Master List

Pairs

- Pontoon (bridge) ≠ Platoon (soldiers)
- Invoke (use law) ≠ Revoke (cancel law)
- Imminent (soon) ≠ Eminent (famous)
- Liable (responsible) ≠ Libel (false writing)
- Incredible (unbelievable) ≠ Incredulous (disbelieving)
- Climatic (weather) ≠ Climactic (climax)

Earlier CDS Pairs

- Discreet (tactful) ≠ Discrete (separate)
- Elicit (draw out) ≠ Illicit (illegal)
- Flaunt (show off) ≠ Flout (break rules)
- Moral (ethics) ≠ Morale (team spirit)
- Prescribe (recommend) ≠ Proscribe (ban)
- Persecute (harass) ≠ Prosecute (take to court)

Military Pairs

- Martial (warlike) ≠ Marshal (rank/organise)
- Ordnance (weapons) ≠ Ordinance (law)
- Corps (unit, 'core') ≠ Corpse (dead body)
- Garrison (stationed) ≠ Guerrilla (irregular)
- Sortie (mission) ≠ Sordid (dirty/immoral)
- Fortitude (inner strength) ≠ Fortification (wall)

Legal/Admin Pairs

- Counsel (adviser) ≠ Council (body/group)

High-Level Pairs

- Venal (corrupt) ≠ Venial (forgivable)

Science/Medical Pairs

- Endemic (always in region) ≠ Epidemic

- Capital (city/money) ≠ Capitol (the building)
- Biannual (twice/year) ≠ Biennial (every 2 years)
- Waver (hesitate) ≠ Waiver (legal document)
- Diffuse (spread) ≠ Defuse (make safe)
- Envelop (surround) ≠ Envelope (paper container)

- Judicial (courts) ≠ Judicious (wise)
- Historic (important) ≠ Historical (about history)
- Apprise (inform) ≠ Appraise (evaluate)
- Militate (work against) ≠ Mitigate (reduce harm)
- Perpetrate (commit) ≠ Perpetuate (continue)

- (sudden outbreak)
- Emaciated (extremely thin) ≠ Emancipated (set free)
- Biotic (living) ≠ Abiotic (non-living)
- Acetic (vinegar/acid) ≠ Ascetic (self-denying)
- Allusion (reference) ≠ Illusion (false perception)
- Adverse (unfavourable) ≠ Averse (personally opposed)

Character Pairs

- Ingenious (clever) ≠ Ingenuous (naive)
- Contemptible (deserves contempt) ≠ Contemptuous (shows contempt)
- Incredible (unbelievable thing) ≠ Incredulous (disbelieving person)
- Luxuriant (lush growth) ≠ Luxurious (comfortable)
- Tortuous (twisting) ≠ Torturous (causing pain)
- Sensual (physical) ≠ Sensuous (aesthetic)

Answer Strategy

- Step 1: Define BOTH words before reading options
- Step 2: Eliminate any option wrong for EITHER word
- Step 3: Correct option is right for BOTH simultaneously
- Trap: one convincing definition + one wrong = eliminate

Root Clues for Quick ID

- -ible (thing) vs -ous (person feeling it)
- pre- (recommend) vs pro-scribe (prohibit)
- per- (harass) vs pro-secute (legal action)
- discrEEt (together) vs discretE (separate E)
- complEment (completE) vs complment (I like)
- biANNual (annual) vs biennIAL (ennial = years)

Current Affairs Pairs

- Ceasefire (temporary halt) ≠ Armistice (formal end)

Verb Confusion Pairs

- Flaunt (show off) ≠ Flout (disobey)
- Invoke (call upon) ≠ Revoke (cancel)

Adjective Confusion

- Imminent (soon) ≠ Eminent (famous)
- Alternate (every other) ≠ Alternative (different)

- Insurgent (rebel) ≠ Resurgent (rising again)

- Reconnaissance (recce) ≠ Renaissance (rebirth)

- Rampart (wall) ≠ Rampant (uncontrolled)

- Censure (condemn) ≠ Censor (suppress content)

- Corroborate (confirm) ≠ Collaborate (work together)

- Apprise (inform) ≠ Appraise (assess)

- Perpetrate (commit crime) ≠ Perpetuate (keep going)

- Deprecate (disapprove) ≠ Depreciate (lose value)

- Diffuse (spread) ≠ Defuse (make safe)

choice)

- Continuous (no break) ≠ Continual (with breaks)

- Historic (important event) ≠ Historical (about history)

- Biannual (2x/year) ≠ Biennial (every 2 years)

- Averse (opposed) ≠ Adverse (unfavourable)



Mock Tests



Subject Quiz



Telegram

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