



On the 1980s and '90s television show *Full House*, fourth-grader Stephanie learns mnemonic devices to remember how to spell certain words. Then, during the spelling bee—a.k.a. THE MOMENT SHE'S BEEN WAITING FOR—Stephanie is sitcom-tragically stumped when she must spell the word “mnemonic,” which, ironically, she didn’t learn.

“Mnemonic device” comes from the Greek word *mnemonikos*, which means “memory aid.” Well-known examples include “**My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nachos**” to remember the order of the planets (RIP, Pluto), or “The ABC Song” set to the tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” to help children learn the alphabet.

Here’s a greatest-hits mnemonic device collection you can apply to future CDC writing, to help you remember which word to use:

- **Affect or effect?** RAVEN can help you with the difference between “affect” (a verb meaning “to influence”) and “effect” (a noun meaning “result”). Remember **Affect Verb Effect Noun**.
- **Compliment or complement?** The opposite of a compliment is an insult. “Insult” starts with an i, and “compliment” has an “i” in the middle. “Complement” means to enhance, which begins with an e.
- **Which or that?** Use “that” in front of defining clauses (clauses essential for the sentence to make sense) and “which” in front of non-defining clauses (clauses that are not essential to the sentence). Use the mnemonic “Sandwich crusts aren’t essential” to remember that “which” and non-defining clauses go together, as seen in this example:
 - My bag **that** has a hole in it is in the closet. (The sentence needs the clause after “that,” so the sentence doesn’t fall apart.)
 - My bag, **which** has a hole in it, is in the closet. (The sentence doesn’t need the clause after “which” to make sense.)
- **It’s or its?** “It’s” is a contraction that means “it is.” The possessive pronoun “its” shows that “it” owns something. Use the mnemonic device “It’s a bird! It’s a plane! It’s an apostrophe between ‘it is!’” to help you remember which word to use.