

English Verbs: to decrease, to reduce, etc.

Many of these words are synonyms and can be interchanged. However, in some situations one word sounds better than another.

to decrease
(number, rate) The mortality rate in the USA is decreasing thanks to modern medicine.
My pulse rate decreases when I finish exercise.
(Opposite: to increase)

to reduce
(quantity, level) We need to reduce the quantity of sugar that we consume.
It's important to reduce the traffic in the town center.
Please reduce the TV volume.
(Opposite: to augment)

to lower
(height, sound, level) The doctor said that I must lower my blood pressure.
Let me just lower the camera. It's too high.
Please lower your voice, I have a headache.
(Opposite: to higher, to raise)

to diminish
(capacity, light) The daylight is diminishing - it's difficult to see now.
My capacity to think clearly has been diminished by alcohol.
(Opposite: to increase, to augment)

to lessen
(effect, time) My presentation is too long, I need to lessen it by 5 minutes.
We need to lessen the impact of global warming.
(Opposite: to increase, to augment)

to shorten
(object, time) Your book is too long. I recommend that you shorten it considerably.
Can you please shorten my skirt, it's too long.
(in a hotel) Can I shorten my stay?
(Opposite: to lengthen)

to shrink
(object) If you wash a wool sweater at 95°C, it will shrink.
When I cooked the meat, it shrank in the oven!
(Opposite: to expand)

to decline
(statistics, interest, feelings) Sales of my book are declining.
Interest in a new restaurant often declines after an initial boom.
(Opposite: to elevate)

Exercise. Complete the following sentences (there is usually more than one possibility, but choose the “best” option).

- 1) If you drive slower you will _____ the amount of fuel that you use.
- 2) I have to _____ my stay in the hotel because of an emergency at home.
- 3) He needs to _____ his English classes due to his work commitments.
- 4) My plants have _____ because I have forgotten to water them.
- 5) The number of accidents on the roads has _____, compared to the same period last year.
- 6) My hope of seeing him alive again is slowly _____ as the years go by.
- 7) His show's popularity has _____ since he became an alcoholic.
- 8) It's important to _____ bad cholesterol levels if they are high.
- 9) Please _____ your speed! You are driving too fast!