

## COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS

### OPPOSITE and CONTRARY

Opposite and contrary have similar meanings, but **cannot be used interchangeably**.

#### Opposite

Use *opposite* as follows:

Black is the opposite of white.  
Up is the opposite of down.

**X is the opposite of Y**

- What's the opposite of *happy*?
- *Sad*.

#### Other common examples:

I'm so upset! I thought I was driving northbound on the highway, and I just realized that I've been driving southbound, instead. I've been driving **in the opposite direction** for over an hour!

Kids often do **the opposite of** what their parents tell them.

Melissa is very athletic, but her sister is **the exact opposite**. Melissa's sister never plays sports of any kind.

**Opposites attract.**

**RULE:** Use **opposite** in **general, everyday expressions**.

## Contrary

Use **contrary** to describe **specific situations**.

### *Examples:*

**Contrary to popular belief**, economic growth leads to stock market declines.

**Contrary to what most people think**, economic growth leads to stock market declines.

Use **contrary** when you want to make a statement, or express an opinion that is **the opposite of what most people believe**.<sup>1</sup>

The expressions **contrary to** and **on the contrary** will ...

**alert** your listener or your reader

that you intend to contradict a popular idea, a popularly held belief, or that you are simply about to contradict something they understood to be true.

### *Examples:*

Mr. A: Bill told me that the client turned down our proposal.

Mr. B: **On the contrary**, the client accepted it without any changes.  
He loved it! We start next week.

## Construction

**Contrary to** + **NOUN**

Contrary to **Bill's statement**, they accepted our proposal.

**Contrary to** + **NOUN CLAUSE**

Contrary to **what Bill said**, they accepted our proposal.

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<sup>1</sup> *Most people* refers to *most people* in the group in question / the contextual group of the conversation. *Most people* in your family, in your office, in your profession, in your country, in the world, etc.

**Contrary to** **what you might have read in the newspaper**, Hillary Clinton has no chance of becoming the next United States' president. The only people who would support her are from the east coast, or are female professionals, such as myself. She will never be able to garner enough electoral college votes to win the presidency. It's too bad, since I believe she'd be an excellent president.

### On the contrary

Semantically, this expression serves the same function as *contrary to*, explained above.

Use it to introduce a contradiction either:

- To what has just been said - *or* –
- To a widely held belief / assumption

This expression stands alone, in terms of structure.

- Begin a **new sentence after** this expression.

### **Examples:**

Al: You must need a lot of money to live in that part of the country.

Li: **On the contrary**. The cost of living is much lower there than in many other places of the country.

Joe: Apparently English is so hard to learn because the grammar is so difficult.

Sue: **On the contrary**. The grammar is relatively easy. The vocabulary, especially the phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions, are what make English so tough.