
The F-Word

Task 1. Count the number of 'F's in the following text.

FINISHED FILES ARE THE RE-
SULT OF YEARS OF SCIENTIF-
IC STUDY COMBINED WITH THE
EXPERIENCE OF YEARS.

Check your answer at the bottom of the page.

The second most common word in English is 'of'. This very important word is difficult to notice but it is used in a lot of important phrases.

Eg	lots of work	the United States of America	the meaning of life
	of course	the best time of day	at the end of the day
	a cup of coffee	the secret of eternal youth	a man of means

Task 2. Look at how 'of' is used in these different text types.

“Stress has become a trivial concept without a clear set of physical symptoms,” he says. “We are all so worried about the effect our jobs have on our mental health that we’re turning into a nation of emotional hypochondriacs. Stress has been around since the 1950s, and if you ask me, it’s become the modern equivalent of when people used to say they had ‘problems with their nerves’....”

Anita Chaudhurt, The Guardian, 2001

A robotic spacecraft will blow up part of a comet with a huge copper bullet is to be built by NASA in an ambitious attempt to examine the nature of comets.

Mark Henderson, the Times, 2001

Mr Richards partly blamed the influence of ‘professional linguists’ who take a relative view of correctness. At least one of his colleagues on the Oxford English Faculty has emerged in her lectures as a relativist. She is Jean Aitchison, holder of the Rupert Murdoch-financed chair in Language and Communication.

John Ezard, The Guardian, 1999

While 86 pc of women look at price tags when they shop, only 72 pc of men do. For a man it is a question of pride – he doesn’t want anyone to think he can’t afford it.

Julliette Dominguez, The Daily Mail, 1999

There were only two Americans stopping at the hotel. They did not know any of the people they passed on the stairs on their way to and from their room. Their room was on the second floor facing the sea. It also faced the public garden and the war monument. There were big palms and green benches in the public garden. In the good weather there was always an artist with his easel. Artists liked the way the palms grew and the bright colors of the hotels facing the gardens and the sea. Italians came from a long way off to look at the war monument. It was made of bronze and glistened in the rain.

Ernest Hemingway, Cat in the Rain

Task 3. Which of the ‘of’ phrases could you learn and use?

Answer: There are six. If you answered three you are normal, if six you are a genius. The reason is that the human brain cannot easily process the word ‘of’.