

“Ergonomic consultant” or “ergonomics consultant”, and other commonly confused terms

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Many people, including ACE members, use the words “ergonomic” and “ergonomics” almost interchangeably. This is happening on websites, in presentations and even in scientific papers. As the Voice of Ergonomics in Canada, it is important that we use these words correctly.

In the example above, “ergonomics consultant” is the correct term [i.e. someone who consults in the field of ergonomics]. The word “ergonomic” implies a better fit with a human. The consultant herself is not ergonomic; the equipment she recommends is.

Ergonomics and usability

The words “ergonomic” and “ergonomics” look similar, so it is easy to mix them up. Here’s a tip to help make the right choice. The word pair “usable/usability” is rarely mixed up and similar in meaning to “ergonomic/ergonomics”. If “usability” makes more sense in what you are trying to say, “ergonomics” is the word you need.

Though we would like everything to be usable/ergonomic, what we are most likely talking about are:

- usability/ergonomics reports
- usability/ergonomics guidelines
- usability/ergonomics standards
- usability/ergonomics programs
- usability/ergonomics assessments

When is it appropriate to use the word “ergonomic”?

“Ergonomic” can correctly be used if the thing being described truly is ergonomic. For example, if a chair fits the user, it can be called an ergonomic chair.

In some cases, either “ergonomic” or “ergonomics” could be the correct word, but the resultant terms will have quite different meanings.

An ergonomic/usable process is not the same thing as an ergonomics/usability process.

An ergonomic tool could be a wrench, keyboard, etc. An ergonomics tool is something used to complete an ergonomics analysis [e.g. NIOSH lifting equation, Liberty Mutual Tables]

Internet search engines

As mentioned previously, the misuse of these words is widespread. Consequently, a customer searching for an “ergonomic consultant” might not find you, if you are using the correct term in your marketing materials. Fortunately, there is a fix for this.

Terms like “ergonomic consultant” and “ergonomic assessment” are technically wrong but it is ok to include them in your website’s keyword list. This list can be found by internet search engines but is

invisible to your website visitors. To learn more about techniques like this, do an internet search for “Help internet search engines find your website with keywords”.

Here is an example:

“Adding keywords for SEO” by SquareSpace

<https://support.squarespace.com/hc/en-us/articles/360001997648-Adding-keywords-for-SEO>

How you can help

Please review your materials for the use of the words “ergonomics” and “ergonomic” and make corrections as appropriate. We might not be able to change the world, but as the Voice of Ergonomics in Canada it is important that we set a good example.

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