

“Effect” vs. “Affect,” a.k.a. Susan’s Pet Peeve

Effect:

Almost always a noun, meaning “impact.”

Examples: “According to economic theory, insurance coverage has a positive effect on utilization.”
“The effect of race on health is negative and significant.”

A rather arcane use of the word “effect” is as a verb, meaning “to bring about”:

“The new policy effected a change in the way people obtained health care.”

Note, however, that the following is WRONG:

“The new policy effected the way people obtained health care.”

Affect:

Unless you’re a shrink*, always a verb.

Examples: “The new policy affected the way people obtained health care.”
“According to economic theory, insurance coverage positively affects utilization.”
“Race affects health in a negative and significant way.”

“Affect” is also sometimes used as a verb meaning “to pretend.”

Example: “The girl affected indifference towards the boy she had a crush on.”

* If you’re a shrink, then you probably use “affect” as a noun denoting mental or emotional state, e.g., “positive affect” (a.k.a. happy) and “negative affect” (a.k.a. unhappy). In this case, the accent is on the first syllable.

THE SIMPLEST WAY TO KEEP THESE STRAIGHT IS TO ALWAYS USE “EFFECT” WHEN YOU WANT A NOUN AND “AFFECT” WHEN YOU WANT A VERB, SINCE 99.99% OF THE TIME, THIS WILL BE HOW YOU USE THEM.