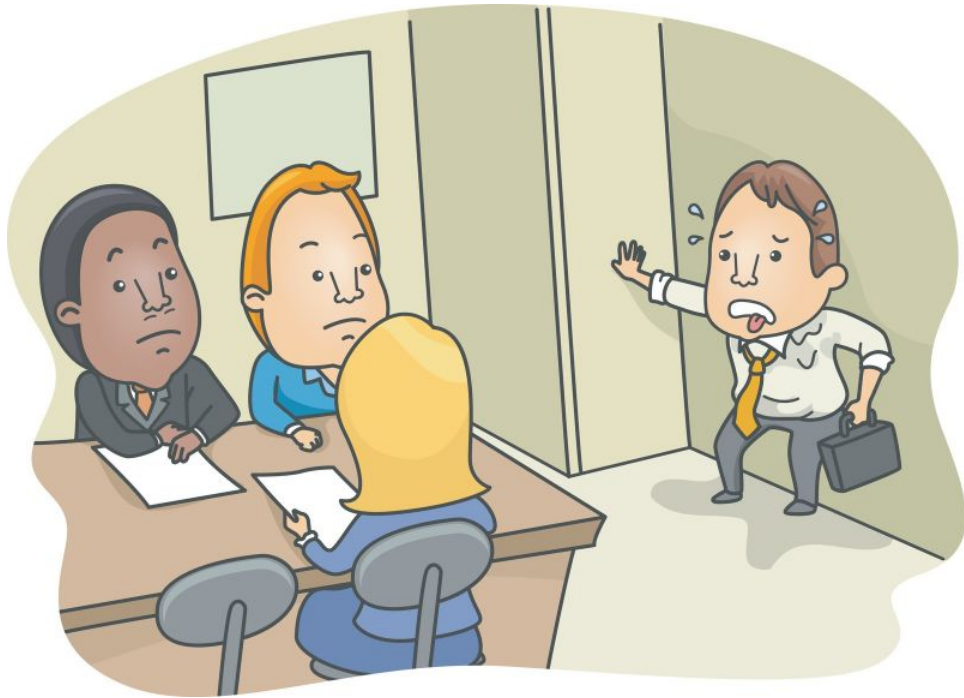


Word for Word

Would You Say You're Apt, Likely, or Liable to Read This Entry?



The words *apt*, *likely*, and *liable* are often used interchangeably when describing possible actions and outcomes. But careful writers know that the words have subtle differences in their meanings.

Apt means “having a tendency” or “ordinarily disposed.”¹ If someone is *apt* to do something, it’s because they have a natural inclination to do it; in other words, doing the thing would be consistent with their character and/or personal history.

Examples:

Moe can be pretty scatterbrained, so he is *apt* to forget that we scheduled a meeting for this afternoon.

Patients who have already participated in clinical trials are apt to do so again.

“Only a regular reader of *Word for Word* is apt to read this entry,” Calvin scoffed.

Likely means “having a high probability of occurring or being true: very probable.”² If someone is *likely* to do something, it’s generally because they are subject to circumstances that favor that outcome.

Examples:

Moe is likely running late to the meeting because his parking garage always has bad traffic after lunch.

Patients who are treated respectfully are likely to engage with their care team.

“Reading this *Word for Word* entry will likely improve your appreciation of good word choice,” Susie said.

Liable can be defined as “exposed or subject to some usually adverse contingency or action.”³ If a person is *liable* to do something, they are (through their own actions or the circumstances of the situation) being put at risk of a bad outcome.

Examples:

If Moe misses another meeting, he is liable to be removed from the project.

Patients who must stop the regimen early are liable to have a recurrence.

“Please don’t make me read your *Word for Word* entry,” Calvin joked. “I’m liable to learn something!”

References

1. Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary. 2021. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apt>. Accessed March 15, 2021.
2. Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary. 2021. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/likely>. Accessed March 15, 2021.

3. Merriam-Webster's Dictionary. 2021. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liable>. Accessed March 15, 2021.

—Joe Munch

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