Elicit vs. Illicit

Although both words may sound and look similar, elicit and illicit have very distinct uses and meanings. Despite this fact, some people still misuse these words and such errors can easily be found online.

Elicit can only be used as a verb meaning "to evoke or draw out a response, answer, or fact from someone in reaction to one's own actions or questions" or to "draw forth something that is latent or potential into existence." Synonyms of elicit include extract, deduce, and construe.

> "Infrequently Asked Questions: Why do smells elicit memories?"
> The Philly Voice

> "Injuries to opposing fantasy players elicit tactless joy"
> Chicago Sun-Times

> "Lemon bars elicit fierce loyalty from fan"
> The Grand Island Independent

Meanwhile, the term illicit is used as an adjective denoting "forbidden by law, rules, or custom" or "contrary to accepted morality."

> "Deaths Linked To Fentanyl Rise As Curbing Illicit Supply Proves Tough"
> NPR

> "UN: KDF Makes money on illicit charcoal exports from Somalia"
> Daily Nation

> "Lachie Whitfield agrees to six-month ban for illicit drug code breach, Graeme Allan, Craig Lambert to be banned for one year"
> Fox Sports

Remember that since elicit is a verb, it has different verb forms, such as eliciting, elicited, and elicits. On the other hand, illicit can only be used as an adjective and therefore, only has one form. Its

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derivatives are the adverb illicitly and the noun illicitness.

A simple tip for remembering which word to use is their beginning letters: to elicit is to evoke and that something that is illicit is illegal.

Now that you've learned the difference between these two words as well as understood their different uses and forms, they should no longer elicit confusion in your writing and it is illicit for you to commit the same mistakes again with both these terms.