Affect vs. Effect

The Rule of Affect:
Affect is a verb that takes an object. Its meaning relates to changing, influencing, causing damage, infecting or attempting to impress.

Examples: If I stay up all night before a test, it affects my ability to perform.
The film affected many, moving them to tears.

The Rule of Effect:
Effect is a noun that means the result of something:

Example: A can of Red Bull has a notable effect on my energy level.

Effect also refers to personal belongings:

Example: The nurse collected the patient’s personal effects.

Another meaning is a particular outcome or sensation:

Example: The elegant furniture, the rich tapestries, and the gorgeous statuary created an effect of grandeur.

The word effect also forms part of certain physical phenomena, such as the Doppler Effect. Effect is also used to refer to sound effects, special effects, and optical effects.

Rare exceptions to the Rule:
As with most English rules, there are exceptions! There are times when affect may be used as a noun, and other times when effect shows up as a verb.

As a noun, affect refers to the state of emotions:

Example: People who have been through a traumatic experience sometimes seem emotionally blank, rather than having the strong affect that you might expect following a crisis.

As a verb, effect can mean to cause or bring about, particularly by overcoming obstacles:

Example: The protest marches may effect change in this volatile situation.

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