Tortuous vs. Torturous

Sometimes, words with similar sounds cause confusion among writers, especially when their spellings are also similar. This is the case with the terms tortuous and torturous. Set apart by a single extra letter \( r \), their meanings are very different from each other. This post will help you determine the difference between these two words so you can properly use them in your sentences.

The word tortuous is used as an adjective which means “marked by repeated twists, bends, or turns” or “excessively lengthy and complex.”

Angela Merkel’s Tortuous Path Toward a German Coalition
New York Times

The tortuous relationship between hipsters and stick-and-ball sports
San Diego Reader

Canucks can’t recover from tortuous five minutes in loss to Bruins
Sportsnet

On the other hand, the term torturous functions as an adjective which means “characterized by, involving, or causing excruciating pain or suffering.”

Cold case no more: Police arrest 5 in ‘torturous’ 1983 slaying
Q13FOX

“The demands being made by the people inside, including ending the torturous practice of solitary confinement, are appeals to be afforded basic human rights and dignity.”
KTVU San Francisco

“Responding to torturous treatment of innocent people ... to whatever small degree
is not unreasonable to me.”
_Bendigo Advertiser_

It may also pertain to figurative pain and suffering.

_Hard part begins for Cubs after a torturous end to the season_
_Chicago Tribune_

_Widow’s ‘torturous’ wait for ex-Dundee man’s funeral four months after Thailand holiday tragedy_
_Evening Telegraph_

_STEVE DeSHAZO: Bizarre loss by Nationals is torturous finale for Werth_
_Fredericksburg_

Now that we have discussed the difference between the words tortuous and torturous, you may be able to properly utilize them in your writing. Remember that tortuous is about complexity and twists while the term torturous pertains to pain and suffering. Despite the tortuous nature of writing, there is no need for it to be torturous.