

List of Commonly Confused Words

In English, there are many words that sound alike but are spelled differently. Why bother to use the right word? Well, for one thing, when you use the wrong spelling, you distract the reader's attention from the content of your writing. Also, the wrong word at the wrong time will confuse the reader since he/she may have to reread your sentence many times to get your intended meaning.

Homonyms can present an especially difficult problem because they sound alike, but the different spellings mean different things. Changing one letter in a word could alter the whole meaning of a sentence. Common phrases are also likely to be written incorrectly because in speech words are often shortened or slurred together so that not all of the letters are pronounced, making it easy to inadvertently leave these letters out when writing.

an--article, used with words that begin with vowels or vowel sounds. **Ex.**--an elephant, an hour, an artichoke, an earthworm

and--conjunction, used to connect words and ideas. **Ex.**--rock and roll; she's going to the store, and I want to go.

accept--verb, to take willingly. **Ex.**--I accept your offer.

except--preposition, to exclude. **Ex.**--I want all the food except the peas, please.

advice--noun, a suggestion or recommendation. **Ex.**--Take my advice.

advise--verb, to show the way, to give advice. **Ex.**--I will advise him of our arrival time.

affect--verb, to change in some way. **Ex.**--Did that movie affect you at all?

effect--noun, the result of something. **Ex.**--The effect of the prism is wonderful.

Allusion-- An allusion is an indirect reference. **Ex.**--Did you catch my allusion to Shakespeare?

illusion -- An illusion is a misconception or false impression. **Ex.**--Mirrors give the room an illusion of depth.

by--preposition, used to show location. **Ex.**--by the river, by the way, by the book, by an orange car.

buy--to purchase. **Ex.**--I will buy that watch.

capital-- Capital refers to a city, Capital also refers to wealth or resources. **Ex.**--The residents of the state capital protested the development plans.

Capitol-- capitol refers to a building where lawmakers meet. **Ex.**--The capitol has undergone extensive renovations.

climactic-- Climactic is derived from climax, the point of greatest intensity in a series or progression of events.

climatic--Climatic is derived from climate; it refers to meteorological conditions. **Ex.**--The climactic period in the dinosaurs= reign was reached just before severe climatic conditions brought on the ice age.

elicit— elicit is a verb meaning to bring out or to evoke.

illicit-- illicit is an adjective meaning unlawful. **Ex.**-- The reporter was unable to elicit information from the police about illicit drug traffic.

emigrate from— emigrate means to leave one country or region to settle in another. **Ex.**-- In 1900, my grandfather emigrated from Russia.

immigrate to-- immigrate means to enter another country and reside there. **Ex.**-- Many Mexicans immigrate to the U.S. to find work.

Hints:

Emigrate begins with the letter E, as does Exit. When you emigrate, you exit a country.

Immigrate begins with the letter I, as does In. When you immigrate, you go into a country

hear--verb, to listen. **Ex.**--I can hear you better when you take your hand away from your mouth.

here--adverb, location that tells where. **Ex.**--Please move the chair over here. Here it is.

it's--contraction of it is. **Ex.**--It's cold outside.

its--possessive pronoun meaning belonging to something that is gender neutral. **Ex.**--The cat lost its collar.

passed--verb, went by or got over something. **Ex.**--My flu symptoms have finally passed. I passed him yesterday.

past--noun, the before, the "what was" that is now gone. **Ex.**--That was all in the past. Her past was plagued with bad decisions.

Principle-- Principle is a noun meaning a basic truth or law. **Ex.**-- The principal taught us many important life principles.

Principal: Principal is a noun meaning the head of a school or an organization **Ex.**-- or a sum of money.

Hint:

To recognize the spelling of Principal first think of yourself as a greedy opportunist. You definitely would want to be a pal of anyone who is in a position of power or anything to do with money. This principal has pal in it.

right--adjective, means correct or proper. **Ex.**--I know I'm right.

write--verb, the action of committing thought to paper. **Ex.**--If I don't write this paper tonight, I'm going to get an F.

sight--noun, sometimes verb, the ability to see. **Ex.**--My sight has cleared up considerably since the doctor took that bandage off my eyes.

site--noun, a place, a location. **Ex.**--That site is a great place to build a house.

cite--verb, to mention or call attention to. **Ex.**--That senator cited several reasons for his pay raise.

suppose--verb, means to think or guess. **Ex.**--I suppose it's O.K. if you buy a snake.

supposed--adjective, accepted as such, ought, should. **Ex.**--Are you supposed to eat that?

than--conjunction, used to show comparison. **Ex.**--My car is bigger than yours. I would rather starve to death than have to eat your cooking!

then--adverb, shows a time sequence or order. **Ex.**--If you drag that tree out of the way, then I will chop it up.

Hints:

Than is used to compare; both words have the letter 'a' in them.

Then tells when; both are spelled the same, except for the first letter.

their--possessive pronoun, meaning belonging to them. **Ex.**--Sure, it's their business since they asked.

there--adverb, shows location. **Ex.**--Look over there. There are three correct answers to this problem.

they're--contraction of "they are." **Ex.**--They're taking the last bar of soap on the shelf. I wonder if they're ready to go yet.

Hints:

If you are using **there** to tell the reader *where*, both words have h-e-r-e. *Here* is also a place.

If you are using **their** as a possessive pronoun, you are telling the reader what "they" own. **Their** has h-e-i-r, which also means *heir*, as in someone who inherits something. Both words have to do with ownership.

They=re is a contraction of they are. Sound out “they are” in the sentence and see if it works. If it does not, it must be one of the previous versions.

to--preposition, shows movement or direction. **Ex.**--to the store, to the one I love. Also, sometimes used with verbs. **Ex.**--I want to go to the movies, but I don't have any money.

too--adverb, means also or to a greater degree. **Ex.**--I should dye my hair, too. This soup is too hot to eat.

two--adjective, the number 2. **Ex.**--Nobody wants two noses.

Hints:

If you are trying to spell out the number, it is always t-w-o. **Two** has a w which is the first letter in word. **Ex.**--The opposite of word is number.

Too is usually used as also when adding or including some additional information. Whenever you want to include something else, think of it as adding; therefore you also need to add an extra ‘o.’

whose--relative pronoun, means person to whom it belongs. **Ex.**--Whose banana peels are these? The boy, whose mother is missing, is very sad.

who's--contraction of who is. **Ex.**--Knock, knock. Who's there? Who's the boss?

your--personal pronoun, belonging to you. **Ex.**--Your lipstick is extremely bright. I think your yard is magnificent.

you're--contraction of "you are." **Ex.**--You're a fool if you think no one will steal your wallet. I think you're a very nice person.

Hints:

Sound out you are in the sentence. If it works in the sentence it can be written as **you=re**. If it sounds awkward, it is probably supposed to be **Your**.

EXAMPLE: **You=re** shoes are muddy. "You are shoes are muddy" does not work, so it should be written as: **Your** shoes are muddy.

Words that don't sound alike but confuse us anyway:

Lie, Lay:

Lie is an intransitive verb meaning *to recline or rest on a surface.* @ Its principal parts are *lie, lay, lain.* *Lay* is a transitive verb meaning *to put or place.* @ Its principal parts are *lay, laid.*

Hint: Chickens lay eggs. I lie down when I am tired.

Set, Sit:

Set is a transitive verb meaning *to put* @ or *to place.* @ Its principal parts are *set, set, set.* *Sit* is an intransitive verb meaning *to be seated.* @ Its principal parts are *sit, sat, sat.* *She set the dough in a warm corner of the kitchen. The cat sat in the warmest part of the room.*

Who, Which, That:

Do not use *which* to refer to persons. Use *who* instead. *That*, though generally used to refer to things, may be used to refer to a group or class of people. *I just saw a boy who was wearing a yellow banana costume. I have to go to math next, which is my hardest class. Where is the book that I was reading?*

Problem phrases:

Supposed to: Do not omit the *to*. @ *Suppose to* is incorrect.

Used to: Same as above. Do not write *use to*.

Toward: There is no *As* @ at the end of the word.

Anyway: Also has no ending *As*. @ *Anyways* is nonstandard.

Couldn't care less: Be sure to make it negative. (Not *I could care less.*)

Chest of drawers: Not *chester drawers*.

For all intents and purposes: Not *intensive purposes*.