



COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS

THE PRINCIPLE

Some words and phrases seem to give all writers trouble, mainly because they sound similar. Here is a short list of the most commonly confused words.

Accept/Except - **Accept** is a verb meaning to receive willingly. **Except** is a preposition that means excluding.

*I **accept** your invitation. Please invite everyone **except** your mother.*

Affect/Effect – **Affect** is a verb meaning to influence or change. **Effect** is generally a noun meaning the result.

*How does sunbathing **affect** your skin? Looking at your shriveled up skin, I can see you have suffered the **effect** of too much sunbathing.*

All ready/Already – **All ready** is a phrase that means completely prepared. **Already** is an adverb that means something has happened previously.

*Dad shouted, “Are we **all ready**?” but we had **already** left the house and were sitting in the car.*

All right/Alright – **All right** is the correct spelling of the phrase that means satisfactory or in good condition. **Alright**, although it is listed in the dictionary, is not a preferred spelling.

*It’s **all right** to use ‘**alright**’ in an informal letter to a friend, but not in academic writing.*

Are/Our – **Are** is the plural present tense of the verb to be. **Our** is a pronoun that indicates ownership by more than one person.

*If we stay up all night doing **our** homework, we **are** likely to fall asleep in class.*

Choose/Chose – **Choose** is the present tense of the verb “to choose” and **chose** is the past tense.

*I **chose** go to the gym yesterday, so I can **choose** to eat ice cream today.*

Could have/Could of – **Could have** is the correct way to write this phrase. “Have” also should follow “would,” “should,” and “might.” **Could of** is incorrect.

*He **could have** and **should have** and **would have** and **might have** done it better had he practiced.*

Good/Well – **Good** is an adjective used to modify a noun. **Well** is an adverb used to modify a verb.

*She swam, ran, and biked **well** in the triathlon because of her **good** training habits.*

It’s/Its – **It’s** is a contraction of “it” and “is.” **Its** is the possessive form of the pronoun “it.”

*It’s crazy to think that people care about grammar, but grammar rears **its** ugly head every day.*

Loose/Lose – **Loose** means not confined. **Lose** is the verb that means failing to keep.

***Loose** change always sticks to the bottom of my shoe. Consequently, I **lose** a lot of time retrieving my money.*

Lead/Led – **Lead** is a metallic element; **lead** is also a verb meaning to direct or to cause to follow. **Led** is the past tense form of the verb to lead.

*With great ability to **lead**, he **led** them into battle where, moments before, **lead** had been flying.*
Lie/Lay – **Lie** is a verb that means to recline. Its main forms are **lie, lay, lain**, and it does not usually take a direct object. **Lay** means to place or put. Its main forms are **lay, laid, laid**, and it is usually followed by a direct object.

*I usually **lie** in bed for hours thinking about what topic to choose for my essay. Maybe I should **lay** a stack of books [“stack of books” is the direct object] next to my bed for inspiration.*

Passed/Past – **Passed** is the past tense of the verb to pass. **Past** can be a noun or an adjective signifying that something has happened previously.

*He frequently **passed** me when we raced against each other. That is in the **past**; I’m faster now, and I’m trying to forget my **past** failures.*

Site/Cite – **Site** is a noun that means a particular place. **Cite** is a verb that means to quote or give credit.

*If you are going to **cite** that passage, you have to know the URL of the Web **site** where it is used.*

Than/Then – **Than** is used in comparative statements. **Then** is a reference to time or a sequence of events.

*I would rather bike or run **than** swim today. Would you like to bike first and **then** go for a run?*

There/Their/They’re – **There** is an adverb meaning in that place. **Their** is a pronoun indicating ownership by more than one person or thing. **They’re** is a contraction of the words they and are.

***There** were too many kittens running around my house, and **their** claws destroyed my furniture. Now that the kittens are scratch-proof, **they’re** no longer banished to the basement.*

To/Too/Two – **To** either indicates direction or comes before a verb to make an infinitive. **Too** means also or very. **Two** is a number.

*I am going **to** the store. I am going **to** go **to** the store **too**. So it seems that **two** of us are going **to** the store. Let’s hope we don’t spend **too** much money.*

Used to and Supposed to – The final “d” is necessary when using these phrases. “Use to” and “suppose to” are incorrect.

*I **used to** ride my bike against traffic, but I found out that you are **supposed to** ride with traffic.*

Weather/Whether – **Weather** is a noun that describes the state of the atmosphere. **Whether** is a conjunction that introduces the first or both of alternative possibilities.

***Whether** we have good **weather** or not, we’re going to race this weekend.*

Where/Wear/Were - **Where** indicates location. To **wear** is a verb meaning to be clothed in. **Were** is the plural past tense of the verb to be.

***Where** are your clothes? Usually we **wear** clothes. They **were** all missing their clothes.*

Who/Whom – **Who** is the subjective pronoun, and **whom** is the objective pronoun. **Who** is used in the same way as other subject pronouns such as he, she, or they; it does the action. **Whom** is used in the same way as other object pronouns such as him, her, and them; it receives the action or follows a preposition.

***Who** wrote the novel For **Whom** the Bell Tolls?*

Who’s/Whose – **Who’s** is a contraction of the words who and is. **Whose** is a possessive pronoun.

***Who’s** going to care if we work on grammar? **Whose** grammar book is this?*

Your/You’re – **Your** is a pronoun that indicates ownership by one person. **You’re** is a contraction of you and are.

***Your** mother called to say **you’re** expected home by 9:00.*