



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.