

Commonly Confused words

<i>Confusables</i>	<i>Meanings</i>
accept except	to agree to receive or do not including
adverse averse	unfavourable, harmful strongly disliking; opposed
advice advise	recommendations about what to do to recommend something
affect effect	to change or make a difference to a result; to bring about a result
aisle isle	a passage between rows of seats an island
all together altogether	all in one place, all at once completely; on the whole
along a long	moving or extending horizontally on referring to something of great length
aloud allowed	out loud permitted
altar alter	a sacred table in a church to change
amoral immoral	not concerned with right or wrong not following accepted moral standards
appraise apprise	to assess to inform someone
assent ascent	agreement, approval the action of rising or climbing up
aural oral	relating to the ears or hearing relating to the mouth; spoken
balmy barmy	pleasantly warm foolish, crazy
bare bear	naked; to uncover to carry; to put up with
bated baited	in phrase 'with bated breath', i.e. in great suspense with bait attached or inserted

bazaar	a Middle Eastern market
bizarre	strange
berth	a bunk in a ship, train, etc.
birth	the emergence of a baby from the womb
born	having started life
borne	carried
bough	a branch of a tree
bow	to bend the head; the front of a ship
brake	a device for stopping a vehicle; to stop a vehicle
break	to separate into pieces; a pause
breach	to break through, or break a rule; a gap
breech	the back part of a gun barrel
broach	to raise a subject for discussion
brooch	a piece of jewellery
canvas	a type of strong cloth
canvass	to seek people's votes
censure	to criticize strongly
ensor	to ban parts of a book or film; a person who does this
cereal	a grass producing an edible grain; a breakfast food made from grains
serial	happening in a series
chord	a group of musical notes
cord	a length of string; a cord-like body part
climactic	forming a climax
climatic	relating to climate
coarse	rough
course	a direction; a school subject; part of a meal
complacent	smug and self-satisfied
complaisant	willing to please
complement	to add to so as to improve; an addition that improves something
compliment	to praise or express approval; an admiring remark
council	a group of people who manage or advise
counsel	advice; to advise
cue	a signal for action; a wooden rod
queue	a line of people or vehicles
curb	to keep something in check; a control or limit
kerb	(in British English) the stone edge of a pavement

currant	a dried grape
current	happening now; a flow of water, air, or electricity
defuse	to make a situation less tense
diffuse	to spread over a wide area
desert	a waterless, empty area; to abandon someone
dessert	the sweet course of a meal
discreet	careful not to attract attention
discrete	separate and distinct
disinterested	impartial
uninterested	not interested
draught	a current of air
draft	a first version of a piece of writing
draw	an even score at the end of a game
drawer	a sliding storage compartment
dual	having two parts
duel	a fight or contest between two people
elicit	to draw out a reply or reaction
illicit	not allowed by law or rules
ensure	to make certain that something will happen
insure	to provide compensation if a person dies or property is damaged
envelop	to cover or surround
envelope	a paper container for a letter
exercise	physical activity; to do physical activity
exorcise	to drive out an evil spirit
fawn	a young deer; light brown
faun	a mythical being, part man, part goat
flaunt	to display ostentatiously
flout	to disregard a rule
flounder	to move clumsily; to have difficulty doing something
founder	to fail
forbear	to refrain
forebear	an ancestor
foreword	an introduction to a book
forward	onwards, ahead
freeze	to turn to ice
frieze	a decoration along a wall

grisly grizzly	gruesome, revolting a type of bear
hoard horde	a store a large crowd of people
imply infer	to suggest indirectly to draw a conclusion
loath loathe	reluctant, unwilling to hate
loose lose	to unfasten; to set free to be deprived of; to be unable to find
meter metre	a measuring device a metric unit; rhythm in verse
militate mitigate	to be a powerful factor against to make less severe
palate palette	the roof of the mouth a board for mixing colours
pedal peddle	a foot-operated lever to sell goods
pole poll	a long, slender piece of wood voting in an election
pour pore	to flow or cause to flow a tiny opening; to study something closely
practice practise	the use of an idea or method; the work or business of a doctor, dentist, etc. to do something repeatedly to gain skill; to do something regularly
prescribe proscribe	to authorize use of medicine; to order authoritatively to officially forbid something
principal principle	most important; the head of a school a fundamental rule or belief
sceptic septic	a person inclined to doubt infected with bacteria
sight site	the ability to see a location
stationary stationery	not moving writing materials
storey story	a level of a building a tale or account

titillate	to arouse interest
titivate	to make more attractive
tortuous	full of twists; complex
torturous	full of pain or suffering
wreath	a ring-shaped arrangement of flowers etc.
wreathe	to surround or encircle
yoke	a wooden crosspiece for harnessing a pair of oxen
yolk	the yellow center of an egg

A, An, And

- *A* (article). Used before a word that begins with a consonant.
a key, **a** mouse, **a** screen
- *An* (article). Used before a word that begins with a vowel.
an airplane, **an** ocean, **an** igloo
- *And* (conjunction). Connects two or more words together.
peanut butter **and** jelly, pen **and** pencil, jump **and** shout

By, Buy

- *By* (preposition). Means next to.
My glasses are **by** the bed.
- *Buy* (verb). Means to purchase.
I will **buy** new glasses after the doctor's appointment.

Its, It's

- *Its* (pronoun). A form of *it* that shows possession.
The butterfly flapped **its** wings.
- *It's* (contraction). Joins the words *it* and *is*.
It's the most beautiful butterfly I have ever seen.

Know, No

- *Know* (verb). Means to understand or possess knowledge.
I **know** the male peacock sports the brilliant feathers.
- *No*. Used to make a negative.
I have **no** time to visit the zoo this weekend.

Quite, Quiet, Quit

- *Quite* (adverb). Means *really* or *truly*.
My work will require **quite** a lot of concentration.

- *Quiet* (adjective). Means not loud.
I need a **quiet** room to complete the assignments.
- *Quit* (verb). Means to stop or to end.
I will **quit** when I am hungry for dinner.

Right, Write

- *Right* (adjective). Means proper or correct.
When bowling, she practices the **right** form.
- *Right* (adjective). Also means the opposite of left.
The ball curved to the **right** and hit the last pin.
- *Write* (verb). Means to communicate on paper.
After the team members bowl, I will **write** down their scores.

Set, Sit

- *Set* (verb). Means to put an item down.
She **set** the mug on the saucer.
- *Set* (noun). Means a group of similar objects.
All the mugs and saucers belonged in a **set**.
- *Sit* (verb). Means to lower oneself down on a chair or another place
I'll **sit** on the sofa while she brews the tea.

Suppose, Supposed

- *Suppose* (verb). Means to think or to consider
I **suppose** I will bake the bread, because no one else has the recipe.
- *Suppose* (verb). Means to suggest.
Suppose we all split the cost of the dinner.
- *Supposed* (verb). The past tense form of the verb suppose, meaning required or allowed.
She was **supposed** to create the menu.

Than, Then

- *Than* (conjunction). Used to connect two or more items when comparing
Registered nurses require less schooling **than** doctors.
- *Then* (adverb). Means next or at a specific time.
Doctors first complete medical school and **then** obtain a residency.

Their, They're, There

- *Their* (pronoun). A form of *they* that shows possession.
The dog walker feeds **their** dogs everyday at two o'clock.
- *They're* (contraction). Joins the words *they* and *are*.
They're the sweetest dogs in the neighborhood.
- *There* (adverb). Indicates a particular place.
The dogs' bowls are over **there**, next to the pantry.

- *There* (pronoun). Indicates the presence of something
There are more treats if the dogs behave.

To, Two, Too

- *To* (preposition). Indicates movement.
Let's go **to** the circus.
- *To*. A word that completes an infinitive verb.
to play, **to** ride, **to** watch.
- *Two*. The number after one. It describes how many.
Two clowns squirted the elephants with water.
- *Too* (adverb). Means *also* or *very*.
The tents were **too** loud, and we left.

Use, Used

- *Use* (verb). Means to apply for some purpose.
We **use** a weed whacker to trim the hedges.
- *Used*. The past tense form of the verb *to use*
He **used** the lawnmower last night before it rained.
- *Used to*. Indicates something done in the past but not in the present
He **used to** hire a team to landscape, but now he landscapes alone.

Who's, Whose

- *Who's* (contraction). Joins the words *who* and either *is* or *has*.
Who's the new student? **Who's** met him?
- *Whose* (pronoun). A form of *who* that shows possession.
Whose schedule allows them to take the new student on a campus tour?

Your, You're

- *Your* (pronoun). A form of *you* that shows possession.
Your book bag is unzipped.
- *You're* (contraction). Joins the words *you* and *are*.
You're the girl with the unzipped book bag.

Accept vs. Except

Accept (verb) - to receive

- I accepted all my birthday gifts with gratitude.

Except (conjunction) - apart from; otherwise than; were it not true

- When Susan travels, she packs everything except the kitchen sink.

Affect vs. Effect

Affect (verb) - to have an effect on; influence; produce a change in; to stir the emotions

- The dog's death affected his owners.

Effect (noun) - anything brought about by a cause or agent; result

- The new speed limit law had little effect on the speed of the motorists.

All Intensive Purposes vs. All Intents and Purposes

"All intensive purpose" is an incorrect use of the phrase "all intents and purposes."

"All intents and purposes" is a phrase that means "for all practical purposes" or "under most usual situations."

- For all intents and purpose, she planned to buy the refrigerator but still wanted to check the reviews.

A Lot vs. Allot

A lot (noun phrase) -many

- A lot of people came to the party.

*"A lot" is always two separate words. "Alot" is not a real word.

Allot (verb) - to distribute, give or assign

- Fifteen minutes were allotted to each of the speakers at the conference.

Allusion vs. Illusion

Allusion (noun) - an indirect reference

- The *Austin Powers* movies often make allusions to the *James Bond* films.

Illusion (noun) - a false idea or conception; belief or opinion not in accord with the facts; an unreal, deceptive, or misleading appearance or image

- The magician created the illusion that he was levitating.

Awhile vs. A While

Awhile (adverb) - for a while; for a short time

- The guests planned to stay awhile.

A while (noun) - for a short time; when while is used as the object of the preposition (for a while) then the "a" is separated from the "while"

- The guests planned to stay for a while.

Bad vs. Badly

Bad (adjective) - not good

- Your feet smell bad.

Badly (adverb) - not well; in a bad manner; harmfully; incorrectly; wickedly; unpleasantly

- Charlotte plays tennis very badly.
- The people involved in the accident were badly hurt.

*Here, a note. Adjectives generally describe nouns, so even if you use the word “bad” following a verb in a sentence, if it’s meant to describe the thing itself, then use the adjective. “Bad” here means the same as “rotten,” “rancid” or “stinky,” all of which are adjectives. If you can replace “bad” with another adjective and still have a sentence that makes sense, then you know that “bad” was the correct choice. Adverbs often describe the manner in which something is done. To say, “your feet smell badly” is to say that your feet are inhaling through the nose and perceiving odors, and that they’re going about it all wrong.

Borrow vs. Lend

Borrow (verb) - to take or accept something for a short time with the intention of returning it to its rightful owner

- May I borrow a pencil, please?

Lend (verb) - to give something for a short time with the intention of getting it back

- Would you please lend me a pencil?

Breath vs. Breathe

Breath (noun) - air taken into the lungs and then let out

- Take a deep breath.

Breathe (verb) - to inhale and exhale

- Just calm down and breathe.

Butt Naked vs. Buck Naked

Butt Naked is a phrase that means to be without clothes.

- The baby tore off his diaper and ran around the house butt naked.

Buck Naked is a phrase that also means to be naked and without clothing.

- The baby tore off his diaper and ran around the house buck naked.

*Note - Neither of these phrases is incorrect. The term buck naked may derive from the term buckskin, that which hides are fashioned. However, neither term has much etymological backing for one being more correct than another.

Cache vs. Cash

Cache (noun) - a safe place to store supplies; anything stored or hidden in such a place

- The hikers found a cache with some cash and jewels.

Cash (noun) - money, coins, bills; currency

- ATM machines dispense cash.

Chomp at the Bit vs. Champ at the Bit

Chomp at the bit - an over used and incorrect form of "champing at the bit"

Champ at the bit (idiom) - ready or anxious; eager to be going or moving along.

- The kids were champing at the bit to see the newest *Harry Potter* movie.

Complement vs. Compliment

Complement (noun) - that which completes or brings to perfection; (verb) - to make complete

- Red wine is a nice complement to a steak dinner.

Compliment (noun) - something said in admiration, praise, or flattery; (verb) - to pay a compliment to; congratulate

- She gave me a nice compliment when she said I looked thin.

Comprise vs. Compose

Comprise (verb) - to include; to contain; to consist of; to be composed of

- The state of North Carolina comprises 100 counties.

Compose (verb) - to form in combination; make up; constitute

- One hundred counties compose the state of North Carolina.

Desert vs. Dessert

Desert (verb) - to forsake or abandon; to leave without permission; to fail when needed

- Soldiers should not desert their posts.

Desert (noun) - dry, barren, sandy region

- The largest desert in the world is the Sahara.

Dessert (noun) - a sweet course served at the end of a meal

- Fruit makes a healthy dessert after lunch or dinner.

Done vs. Did

Done (adjective) - completed; sufficiently cooked; socially acceptable

Done (verb) - the past participle of do

- After an hour, the roast was done.

Did (verb) - past tense of do

- The children did not want to leave the playground.

Elicit vs. Illicit

Elicit (verb) - to draw forth; evoke

- The teacher elicited answers from the students.

Illicit (adjective) - unlawful; illegal

- The teacher discovered illicit drugs in a student's desk.

Fair to Midland vs. Fair to Middling

Fair to midland - an incorrect use of the phrase "fair to middling"

Fair to middling (phrase) - something that is moderate to average in quality

- The temperature was fair to middling today.

Had Bought vs. Had Boughten

Had Bought (verb) - the past perfect tense of the verb buy

- The teacher had bought Christmas presents for all of students early in the year.

Had Boughten - incorrect usage of the past perfect tense

Hone vs. Home

Hone (verb) - to sharpen; to yearn or long for; to grumble or moan

- Practicing the piano daily is a good way to hone your skills.

Home (noun) - dwelling; place where a person lives

- After the long drive, we were all ready to be home and asleep.

Idiosyncrasy vs. Idiosyncrasy

Idiosyncrasy (noun) - any personal peculiarity or mannerism; individual reaction to food or drug.

- Twins have idiosyncrasies, which often help to distinguish one from the other.

Idiosyncrasy is a misspelling of idiosyncrasy.

Imitated vs. Intimated

Imitated (verb) - past tense of the verb imitate, which means to seek to follow the example of; impersonate; mimic

- The toddler imitated the dog by crawling on hands and knees and barking.

Intimated (verb) - to make known indirectly; to hint or imply

- The pirate intimated that he knew where the treasure was buried.

In a Sense vs. In Essence

In a sense (idiom) - in a way; in one way of looking at it

- In a sense, computers have been a boon to society.

In essence (idiom) - by nature; essentially

- The cat is, in essence, quiet and timid.

In One Foul Swoop vs. In One Fell Swoop

In one foul swoop - an incorrect use of the phrase "in one fell swoop"

In one fell swoop - a phrase meaning "all at once"

- In one fell swoop, the toy was demolished by the child.

Its vs. It's

Its (possessive pronoun) - of, belonging to, made by, or done by it

- The dog will only eat its food when I am also eating.

It's (contraction) of it + is

- It's a very strange dog.

I Could Of vs. I Could Have

I could of - an incorrect use of the verb phrase could have; when written as a contraction "could've" sounds like "could of."

I could have - is the past perfect tense of the verb could

- I could have gone to the play, but I had to study that night

I Should of vs. I Should Have

I should of - an incorrect use of the verb phrase should have; when written as a contraction "should've" sounds like "should of."

I should have - is the past perfect tense of the verb should

- I should have gone to the play instead of study because I failed my test anyway.

I Would Of vs. I Would Have

I would of - an incorrect use of the verb phrase would have; when written as a contraction "would've" sounds like "would of."

I would have - is the past perfect tense of the verb would

- I would have gone to the play except my car wouldn't start.

Lead vs. Led

Lead (noun) - a heavy, soft, malleable, bluish-gray metallic chemical element used in batteries and in numerous alloys and compounds

- I think it was Mrs. White in the billiard room with the lead pipe.

Led (verb) - past tense and past participle of the verb "to lead"

- The two coaches have each led their teams to numerous championships.

Lose vs. Loose

Lose (verb) - to become unable to find; to mislay; to fail to win or gain

- Did you lose your glasses again?
- How many games did your team lose last season?

Loose (adjective) - not tight; giving enough room

- I've lost twenty pounds, and now these jeans are really loose.

More/Most Importantly vs. More/Most Important

More/most importantly - a phrase used often in writing to show emphasis; however, many grammarians insist that this is not correct usage. The adverbial ending of -ly is not needed.

More/most important - this phrase should be used instead

- The most important part of story is the ending.

Passed vs. Past

Passed (verb) - past tense of the verb "to pass"

- I think we passed the store. Let's turn around and go back.

Past (adjective) - of a former time; bygone; (noun) - the time that has gone by; days, months, or years gone by

- In the past, I've gotten lost a lot, but this time I know where we are.

Precede vs. Proceed

Precede (verb) - to be, come, or go before in time, place, order, rank, or importance

- The election of a new president precedes his inauguration.

Proceed (verb) - to advance or go on, especially after stopping

- After your first assignment has been completed and approved, you may proceed to the second one.

Principal vs. Principle

Principal (noun) - a governing or presiding officer, specifically of a school; (adjective) - first in rank, authority, importance, degree, etc.

- The student's parents had to have a meeting with the principal.

Principle (noun) - a fundamental truth, law, doctrine, or motivating force, upon which others are based

- The student's parents thought that they had instilled stronger moral principles in their son.

Seen vs. Saw

Seen (verb) - past participle of the verb see; must be used with the verbs has, have, or had

- I have seen the movie three times.
- *Note: I seen the movie three times is not correct though it is commonly used in spoken language.

Saw (verb) - past tense of the verb see

- I saw the movie yesterday.

Sell vs. Sale

Sell (verb) - to give up, deliver or exchange for money

- People who move often sell unwanted items instead of packing them.

Sale (noun) - the act of selling; the work, department, etc. of selling

- After Christmas sales always bring in the bargain shoppers.

Site vs. Sight

Sight (noun) - something seen, a view, field of vision

- She was a sight for sore eyes.

Site (noun) - a piece of land considered for a specific purpose

- The corner lot was a perfect site for the new shopping center.

Spitting Image vs. Spirit and Image

"Spitting image" is a phrase that means exactly like. The first known use in writing of this phrase was in 1901.

- Karen is the spitting image of her mother.

"Spirit and Image" - There is some speculation that the "spit" in the phrase "spitting image" came from the word "spirit" in the phrase "spirit and image." However, there is no etymological basis for this belief since the phrase "spirit and image" used in reference to an exact likeness is not found in writing. The terms "spit," "spit and image," and "dead spit" have all been found to refer to a likeness since the 1800's.

Stationary vs. Stationery

Stationary (adjective) - not moving or not movable; fixed or still

- I rode the stationary bike at the gym for an hour.

Stationery (noun) - writing materials; specifically, paper and envelopes used for letters

- My grandmother has given me a lot of stationery over the years. I think she wants me to use it to write her.

Taut vs Taunt

Taut (adjective) - tightly stretched; showing strain; tidy or well-disciplined

- The taut rope held the luggage to the roof.

Taunt (verb) - to reproach in scornful or sarcastic language; to drive or provoke

- The home team taunted the visitors with cheers every time the visiting team made an error.

Than vs. Then

Than (conjunction) - used to introduce the second element in a comparison

- My right foot is bigger than my left foot.

Then (adverb) - at that time; next in order; (adjective) - of that time; (noun) - that time

- Take off all your clothes first. Then get in the shower.
- Emily drove up to New York with her then boyfriend, Nick.
- Let's wait until we're hungry; we can decide what we want to eat then.

Their vs. There vs. They're

Their (adjective) - of, belonging to, made by, or done by them

- They were proud of their work.

There (noun) - that place or point

- Just put it over there.

They're (contraction) of they + are

- They're going out to dinner tonight.

To vs. Too vs. Two

To (preposition) - in the direction of and reaching; as far as; to the extent of

- I'm going to Baltimore.

Too (adverb) - in addition; as well; besides; also; more than enough; superfluously; overly; to a regrettable extent; extremely

- I'm going to Baltimore, too.
- I'm too busy. I can't go to Baltimore.

Two (adjective) the number 2

- I have two jobs.

Your vs. You're

Your (adjective) - belonging to you

- Is this your dog?

You're (contraction) - you are

- You're a great mother!

Who vs. Whom

Who (subject pronoun) - what or which person or persons; the person or persons that, or a person that (used to introduce a relative clause)

- Who is going to the party with you?

Whom (object pronoun) - what or which person or persons; the person or persons that, or a person that (used to introduce a relative clause)

- With whom are you going to the party?