

When words have similar spelling, pronunciation, or meaning, those words can be confusing. Being able to define and use words correctly will help you express your thoughts more clearly. While this handout reviews confusing word pairs and word groups generally, always work with your audience and assignment in mind.

Accept/Except

Accept is a verb showing agreement, and **except** is typically a preposition indicating exclusion.

Example: I **accept** your apology.

Example: I like all vegetables **except** broccoli.

Affect/Effect

Affect is a verb meaning to influence, and **effect** refers to a result (noun) or cause (verb).

Example: Will missing class **affect** my grade?

Example: The **effect** of missing class will be a lower grade. (noun)

Example: Only the supervisor could **effect** change to the rules. (verb)

Allusion/Illusion

Allusion is a noun describing an indirect reference to something, and **illusion** is a noun indicating something that gives a false meaning or appearance.

Example: The speaker made an **allusion** to a Greek myth.

Example: A magician uses **illusion** to entertain the audience.

Among/Between

Among is a preposition describing association or closeness to three or more people or things, and **between** is also a preposition describing association or closeness, but it only refers to two people or things.

Example: There was a discussion **among** the group of friends.

Example: The argument was **between** Daniel and David.

Cite/Site/Sight

Cite is a verb meaning to quote an example or authority. **Site** is a noun meaning a particular place. **Sight** is another noun which describes the function of seeing.

Example: You must **cite** all your sources in your research paper.

Example: We visited several tourist **sites**.

Example: Human beings have five senses: **sight**, touch, taste, sound, and smell.

Compliment/Complement

A **compliment** is a noun referring to an expression of praise, and **complement** is a noun that means to complete or add to something.

Example: Her **compliment** of my new dress made me smile.

Example: Butter is the perfect **complement** for bread.

Council/Counsel

Council is a noun meaning a group of people who meet to make decisions, and **counsel** can mean advice (noun) or the act of giving advice (verb).

Example: Anne was elected president of the school's student **council**.

Example: My mom gave me good **counsel** about living on my own. (noun)

Example: She **counseled** me to not procrastinate my homework. (verb)

Explicit/Implicit

Explicit is an adjective meaning direct, and **implicit** is an adjective meaning implied.

Example: Professor Anderson gave **explicit** instructions for writing the paper.

Example: Her description of the party contained an **implicit** insult of the host.

Farther/Further

Farther is an adjective that describes a literal distance and indicates a greater extent or degree, and **further** is an adjective meaning more distant in time, space, quantity, or degree.

Example: My house is **farther** from campus than yours.

Example: Nothing could be **further** from the truth.

Fewer/Less

Fewer is an adjective meaning a small number of people or things that can be counted, and **less** is an adjective that refers to a small, non-specific amount.

Example: I own **fewer** books than my brother.

Example: I prefer **less** salt on my popcorn.

Good/Well

Good is an adjective meaning suitable, and **well** is most often an adverb indicating competence or completion or an adjective indicating good health.

Example: It was a **good** movie.

Example: She plays basketball **well**.

Imply/Infer

Imply is a verb meaning to suggest or state indirectly (referring to the action of the author or speaker), and **infer** is a verb meaning to draw a conclusion (referring to the action of the reader or audience).

Example: He **implied** that I wasn't capable of completing the job.

Example: I **inferred** there was trouble from the sight of the police cars.

Its/It's

The word **its** is a personal possessive pronoun of the word *it*, and **it's** is a contraction of *it is* or *it has*.

Example: The bird broke **its** wing.

Example: Unfortunately, **it's** time to leave. (it is)

Example: **It's** been a while since I've seen you. (it has)

Lay/Lie

Lay is often a verb describing the act of placing an object down on a surface, and **lie** is often a verb meaning to be horizontally positioned on a surface

Example: Lay the book on the table.

Example: I'm going to lie down for a while.

Like/As

Like is often a preposition indicating close resemblance; **as** is an adverb used to compare or show equivalence.

Example: The boy swam like a fish.

Example: Ramone dressed up as a doctor for his presentation.

Loose/Lose

Loose is an adjective meaning not tight, and **lose** is a verb that means to misplace or to be defeated.

Example: I like to wear loose clothing.

Example: I hate it when I lose my keys. (misplace)

Example: The team was hoping they wouldn't lose the game. (defeated)

May be/Maybe

The phrase **may be** is used as a verb to mean something is likely, and **maybe** is an adverb indicating possibility.

Example: The storm may be more hazardous than we thought.

Example: Maybe you should go to the doctor and have your sore throat checked.

Principal/Principle

Principal is a noun meaning the head of a school or an adjective meaning most important, and **principle** is a noun meaning a basic truth.

Example: Mrs. Sanchez, the principal of the school, is a very energetic woman. (noun)

Example: The principal speaker of the program went first. (adjective)

Example: When doing business, it is a good principle to be honest with clients.

Quite/Quiet/Quit

Quite is an adverb meaning whole or complete, **quiet** is an adjective meaning not making much noise, and **quit** is a verb meaning to stop or give up.

Example: She is quite thorough in her calculations.

Example: Please be quiet during the performance.

Example: I quit my job last Thursday.

Set/Sit

Set is often a verb meaning to place and is used when talking about an object or place, and **sit** is a verb meaning to be seated and is used when talking about something physically taking the sitting position.

Example: Ashley set her books on the table and got a snack.

Example: Come sit by me.

Than/Then

Than is a conjunction introducing a additional elements in a comparison, and **then** is an adverb meaning at that time, next, or after.

Example: I am taller **than** my sister.

Example: He picked up the tickets, and **then** he picked up his friend.

There/Their/They're

There is often used as an adverb meaning in an area, **their** is a personal possessive pronoun for *they*, and **they're** is a contraction for *they are*.

Example: Put the books down **there**.

Example: It's **their** fault!

Example: **They're** going to eat dinner at seven.

Thorough/Through/Threw

Thorough is an adjective meaning complete in all respects, **through** is a preposition meaning in one side and out another side, and **threw** is the irregular past tense form of the verb throw.

Example: Steve did a **thorough** job washing my car.

Example: To get to my apartment, you must drive **through** the tunnel.

Example: Sarah **threw** the ball at me and hit me in the head.

To/Too/Two

To can either be a preposition or the first part of an infinitive verb phrase, **too** is an adverb meaning in addition, and **two** is the word for the number 2.

Example: My mom sent me **to** the store. (preposition)

Example: **To** break the law is wrong. (infinitive)

Example: I like dancing, but I like singing **too**.

Example: I have **two** dogs.

Weather/Whether

Weather is a noun that refers to the temperature, precipitation, and other conditions of the atmosphere, and **whether** is a conjunction that indicates a choice between things.

Example: We are having unusual **weather** for this time of year.

Example: Miguel couldn't decide **whether** he should go to the dance or stay home.

Whose/Who's

Whose is a personal possessive pronoun for *who*, and **who's** is a contraction for *who is* or *who has*.

Example: **Whose** book is that anyway?

Example: **Who's** here? (who is)

Example: **Who's** got the answer? (who has)

Your/You're

Your is a personal possessive pronoun for *you*, and **you're** is a contraction for *you are*.

Example: Is that **your** new car?

Example: **You're** a good friend.