Confusing Word Pairs

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Accept/Except
accept: A verb meaning “to agree to” or “to receive”
EXAMPLE: I accept your apology.
except: A preposition meaning “excluding”
EXAMPLE: I like all vegetables except broccoli.

Affect/Effect
affect: A verb meaning “to influence”
EXAMPLE: Will missing class affect my grade?
effect: A noun meaning “result” or a verb meaning “to cause”
EXAMPLES: The effect of missing class will be a lower grade. (noun)
Only the supervisor could effect change to the rules. (verb)

Allusion/Illusion
allusion: A noun describing an indirect reference to something
EXAMPLE: The speaker made an allusion to a Greek myth.
illusion: A noun indicating something that misleads or gives a false meaning or appearance
EXAMPLE: A magician uses illusion to entertain the audience.

Among/Between
among: A preposition meaning “common to” that refers to three or more people or things
EXAMPLE: There was a discussion among the group of friends.
between: A preposition meaning “common to” that refers to two people or things
EXAMPLE: The argument was between Ramon and me.

Cite/Site/Sight
cite: A verb meaning “to quote an example or authority”
EXAMPLE: You must cite all of your sources in your research paper.
site: A noun meaning “a particular place”
EXAMPLE: We visited several tourist sites.
sight: A noun describing the function of “seeing”
EXAMPLE: Human beings have five senses: sight, touch, taste, sound, and smell.

Compliment/Complement
compliment: A noun that means “an expression of flattery, praise, or admiration”
EXAMPLE: Her compliment of my new dress made me smile.
complement: A noun that means “to complete” or “to add to” something
EXAMPLE: Butter is the perfect complement for bread.

Council/Counsel
council: A noun meaning “a group of people who meet together to make decisions”
EXAMPLE: Kamri was elected president of the school’s student council.
counsel: A noun meaning “advice” or a verb meaning “to advise”
EXAMPLES: My mom gave me good counsel about living on my own. (noun)
She counseled me to not procrastinate my homework. (verb)
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**Explicit/Implicit**

explicit: An adjective meaning “direct”

EXAMPLE: Professor Anderson gave explicit instructions for writing the paper.

implicit: An adjective meaning “implied”

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

**Farther/Further**

farther: An adjective that describes an actual distance and that means “a greater extent or degree”

EXAMPLE: My house is farther from campus than yours.

further: An adjective meaning “more distant in degree, time, space, or quantity”

EXAMPLE: Nothing could be further from the truth.

**Fewer/Less**

fewer: An adjective meaning “a small number” that refers to things that can be counted

EXAMPLE: Children have fewer teeth than adults.

less: An adjective meaning “little” that refers to a general amount or non-countable measurement

EXAMPLE: I prefer less salt on my popcorn.

**Good/Well**

good: An adjective meaning “suitable”

EXAMPLE: It was a good movie.

well: An adjective meaning “in a proper manner”

EXAMPLE: She plays basketball well.

**Imply/Infer**

imply: A verb meaning “to suggest or state indirectly” that refers to the action of the speaker

EXAMPLE: He implied that I wasn’t capable of completing the job.

infer: A verb meaning “to conclude” that refers to the action of the listener

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

**Its/It’s**

its: A personal possessive pronoun of “it”

EXAMPLE: The bird broke its wing.

it’s: A contraction meaning “it is” or “it has”

EXAMPLE: Unfortunately, it’s time to leave, even though it’s been a while since I’ve seen you.

**Lay/Lie**

lay: A verb that means “to put or place” and that needs a direct object

EXAMPLE: Lay the book on the table.

lie: A verb that means “to rest or recline” and that takes no direct object

EXAMPLE: I’m going to lie down for a while.

**Like/As**

like: A preposition meaning “resembling closely”

EXAMPLE: The boy swam like a fish.

as: An adverb meaning “equally” that is used when making a comparison

EXAMPLE: Bryce dressed up as a doctor for his presentation.
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Loose/Lose
loose: An adjective meaning “not tight”
   EXAMPLE: I like to wear loose clothing.
lose: A verb that means “to misplace” or “to be defeated”
   EXAMPLE: I hate it when I lose my keys.

May be/Maybe
may be: A verb phrase meaning “it might be possible”
   EXAMPLE: The storm may be more hazardous than we thought.
maybe: An adverb showing possibility
   EXAMPLE: Maybe you should go to the doctor and have your sore throat checked.

Principal/Principle
principal: A noun meaning “the head of a school” or an adjective meaning “most important”
   EXAMPLES: Mrs. Smith, the principal of the school, is a very energetic woman. (noun)
   The principal speaker of the program spoke first. (adjective)
principle: A noun meaning “a basic truth”
   EXAMPLE: Lying is against my principles.

Quite/Quiet/Quit
quite: An adverb meaning “whole” or “complete”
   EXAMPLE: He is quite thorough in his calculations.
quiet: An adjective meaning “not making noise”
   EXAMPLE: Please be quiet; the baby is sleeping.
quit: A verb meaning “to stop” or “give up”
   EXAMPLE: I quit my job last Thursday.

Set/Sit
set: A verb meaning “to place” and requiring a direct object
   EXAMPLE: Ashley set her books on the table and got a snack.
sit: A verb meaning “to be seated” and that takes no direct object
   EXAMPLE: Come sit by me.

Than/Then
than: A conjunction introducing a second element in a comparison
   EXAMPLE: I am taller than my sister.
then: An adverb meaning “at that time,” “next,” or “after”
   EXAMPLE: He picked up the tickets, and then he picked up his date.

There/Their/They’re
there: An adverb meaning “in that place”
   EXAMPLE: Put the books down there.
their: A personal possessive pronoun for “they”
   EXAMPLE: It’s their fault!
they’re: A contraction for “they are”
   EXAMPLE: They’re going to eat dinner at seven.
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Thorough/Through/Threw
thorough: An adjective meaning “complete in all respects”
   EXAMPLE: Steve did a thorough job washing my car.
through: A preposition meaning “in one side and out another side”
   EXAMPLE: To get to my apartment, you must drive through the tunnel.
threw: The irregular past tense form of the verb “throw”
   EXAMPLE: Chris threw the ball at me and hit me in the head.

To/Too/Two
to: Either a preposition or the initial part of an infinitive verb phrase
   EXAMPLES: My mom sent me to the store. (preposition)
   To break the law is wrong. (infinitive)
too: An adverb meaning “also”
   EXAMPLE: I like dancing, and I like singing, too.
two: The number 2
   EXAMPLE: I have two dogs.

Weather/Whether
weather: A noun referring to the condition of the atmosphere
   EXAMPLE: We are having unusual weather for this time of year.
whether: A conjunction that indicates a choice between things
   EXAMPLE: Sarah couldn't decide whether she should go to the dance or stay home and study.

Whose/Who's
whose: A personal possessive pronoun for “who”
   EXAMPLE: Whose book is that anyway?
who's: A contraction for “who is” or “who has”
   EXAMPLES: Who's here?
   Who's got the answer?

Would of/ Would've
would of: This is the incorrect form of “would have”
would've: A contraction for “would have”
   EXAMPLE: I would've gotten a better grade if I had tried harder.

Your/You’re
your: A personal possessive pronoun for “you”
   EXAMPLE: Is that your new car?
you’re: A contraction for “you are”
   EXAMPLE: You’re a good friend.