

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.” It is the opposite of explicit.

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 adverb 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: An adjective describing the number that is more than one but less than three.

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.