

Commonly Confused Words

Spelling

Good writers master words that are easy to misuse and misspell. Study the following words, noting how their meanings and spellings differ. When the two words are pronounced differently, phonetic respellings are given.

- accept, except** *Accept* (ak SEPT) means "to agree to something" or "to receive something willingly." *Except* (ik SEPT) usually means "not including."
Mark refused to accept his sister's apology.
Everyone's here except Joon.
- adapt, adopt** *Adapt* (uh DAPT) means "to make apt or suitable; to adjust." *Adopt* (uh DAHPT) means "to opt or choose as one's own; to accept."
Jackie has adapted well to her new home.
The family has adopted some strange ideas about housekeeping.
- advice, advise** *Advice* (ad VYS) is a noun that means "counsel given to someone." *Advise* (ad VYZ) is a verb that means "to give counsel."
I didn't ask for your advice.
The nurse advised me to get some rest.
- affect, effect** *Affect* (uh FEKT) means "to move or influence" or "to wear or to pretend to have." *Effect* as a verb means "to bring about." As a noun, *effect* (ih FEKT) means "the result of an action."
My parents' opinion affects what I do.
Starina has affected an air of sophistication.
The committee effected a change in the village ordinance.
The petition had no effect on the senator's decision.
- all ready, already** *All ready* means "all are ready" or "completely prepared." *Already* means "previously."
The kids were all ready to go downtown.
The kids have already gone downtown.
- all right** *All right* is the correct spelling. *Alright* is nonstandard and should not be used.
- a lot** *A lot* may be used in informal writing. *Alot* is incorrect.
- all together, altogether** *All together* means "at the same time or in the same place." *Altogether* is an adverb that means "entirely" or "on the whole."
Let's forget the idea altogether.
The kittens curled up all together on the couch.
- capital, capitol, the Capitol** *Capital* means "excellent," "most serious," or "most important." It also means "seat of government." A *capitol* is "a building in which a state legislature meets." The *Capitol* is "the building in Washington, D.C., in which the U.S. Congress meets."
Start each sentence with a capital letter.
Lima is the capital of Peru.
We had a tour of the state capitol.
A crowd of protesters gathered around the Capitol.
- choose, chose** *Choose* (chooz) is a verb that means "to decide or prefer." *Chose* (chohz) is the past tense form of *choose*.
Which plant did you choose to keep?
You're the one who chose to have a garden.
- desert, dessert** *Desert* (DEZ urt) means "a dry, sandy, barren region."
Dessert (dih ZURT) means "to abandon." *Dessert* (dih ZURT) is a sweet, such as cake.
It's as dry as a desert in here!
The chickens had long since deserted the old farm.
Mikaela left plenty of room for dessert.

Commonly Confused Words (cont.)

Spelling

- its, it's** *Its* is a possessive pronoun. *It's* is a contraction for *it is* or *it has*.
The chicken has lost some of its feathers.
It's a sorry sight.
- lay, lie** *Lay* (lay) is a verb that means "to place." It takes a direct object. *Lie* (ly) is a verb that means "to be in a certain place." *Lie*, or its past form *lay*, never takes a direct object.
Just lay the baby down in the crib.
Sean went to lie down.
- lead, led** *Lead* can be a noun (led) that means "a heavy metal" or a verb (lead) that means "to show the way." *Led* (led) is the past tense form of the verb.
We have to replace the house's lead water pipes.
Count on Charo to lead the way.
George led us down a narrow hallway.
- lose, loose** *Lose* (looz) means "to mislay or suffer the loss of something." *Loose* (loos) means "free" or "not fastened."
I always lose my mittens.
The goats just run around loose in the field.
- principal, principle** *Principal* means "of chief or central importance" and refers to the head of a school. *Principle* is a "basic truth, standard, or rule of behavior."
The library's principal donor remains anonymous.
Dusty Valley High School has a new principal.
Kevin rides his bike as a matter of principle.
- quiet, quite** *Quiet* (KWY it) refers to "freedom from noise or disturbance." *Quite* (kwyt) means "truly" or "almost completely."
Keep quiet down there!
That's quite a good vacuum cleaner.
- set, sit** *Set* (set) means "to place" and takes a direct object. *Sit* (sit) means "to occupy a seat or a place" and does not take a direct object.
Please don't set anything on that counter.
Come sit down over here.
- than, then** *Than* (than) is used to introduce the second part of a comparison. *Then* (then) means "next in order."
Cows are bigger than goats.
Feed the goats and then feed the cows.
- their, there, they're** *Their* means "belonging to them." *There* means "in that place." *They're* is the contraction for *they are*.
The horses are in their stalls.
The ducks are by the pond over there.
The sheep seem to think they're the only ones who need attention.
- whose, who's** *Whose* is the possessive form of *who*. *Who's* is a contraction for *who is* or *who has*.
Whose blueberry jam do you like best?
Who's going to pay for all this jam?
- your, you're** *Your* is the possessive form of *you*. *You're* is a contraction for *you are*.
Your recipe for cornbread is the best I've ever tasted.
You're one of the best cooks in the state.