

FREQUENTLY CONFUSED WORDS

Misused and confused words make reading your essays like reading a road map the wrong way. They give your reader the wrong direction (and they suggest to the reader that you're not being careful).

The following is a list of words that are NOTORIOUS for getting mixed up and causing problems for students and adult writers, too. Try to learn them and AVOID THEM. But also keep this list handy for proofreading; scan your work specifically for these words BECAUSE SPELL CHECK WON'T ALWAYS FIND THEM FOR YOU!

a lot (not alot) • it's **never** one word; it is **always** two words: a lot
EX. *Harold ate a lot of pepperoni, anchovy, broccoli, and green onion pizza; he was up all night with a lot of sickness as a result.*

• THESE ARE SOME OTHER WORDS THAT ARE FREQUENTLY "SMOOSHED TOGETHER" *but should not be:*

- each other/ in fact/ in spite of/ even though/ in front of/ - after all/ in between/ no one/ next to/ because of/ used to

all right (not alright) • it's **never** one word; it is ALWAYS TWO SEPARATE WORDS.

EX. *Jane got the answers all right. Bonnie made mistakes, but her parents said that it was all right because she had done her best.*

already/all ready

• already = previously • all ready = completely prepared

EX. *When he arrived home, his wife was already asleep, even though she promised to be all ready to go to the movies.*

altogether/all together

• altogether = completely, entirely • all together = grouped as one

EX. *She gathered the pieces of the portfolio all together, and she decided that the process of compiling her artwork was altogether satisfactory.*

accept/except

• accept = to agree with, to receive; (noun form = acceptance) •

except = to exclude; "all but this one" (noun form = exception)

EX. *I accept all of the rules except the final one that says I can't use*

my cell phone after 8 p.m.

advice/advise

- advice = (a noun) the information that you give to another but don't necessarily take yourself
- advise = (a verb) the act of giving information to another EX. *Your guidance counselor offered good advice; I advise you to follow the plan that he suggested.*

aloud/allowed

□ aloud = spoken out loud □ allowed = permitted

EX. *We were allowed to speak aloud but not so loud as to disturb those who were trying to study.*

among/between

- among = use with MORE THAN two
- between = use with JUST TWO

EX. *Grandfather divided his lottery winnings among his four children, and my father divided his share between my sister and me.*

affect/effect

- affect = (used as a verb) to influence EX. *That movie affected me strongly; I was half-awake all night thinking of bleeding limbs.*

- affect = (used as a noun) feeling or emotion as expressed on a person's face or general mood, usually used in a psychological context

EX. *The criminal psychologist pointed out that the killer showed no affect when describing how he murdered the lawyer.*

- effect = (used as a noun) the result of an action EX. *I won't go to any more hacker films if they have that effect on me.*

- effect = (used as a verb) to cause a change or put something into action

EX. *The government will effect the Immigration policy at the start of the month.*

bare/bear/bear + bore

□ bare = unclothed; undecorated; plain □ bear = (as a noun) a big brown animal □ bear = (as a verb) to carry; to put up with (past tense is "bore") Common phrases:

“bore a striking resemblance to her brother” “you have the right to bear arms. . .” “they came bearing gifts. . .” “grin and bear it”
EX. *A bear in the woods is bare, since he wears no clothes, but he may be bearing a jar of honey. A boar, by the way, is an entirely different animal! And neither one is boring.*

break/brake

□ break = (as a verb) damage something; to stop something □
brake = (as a noun) the mechanism used to stop a vehicle’s motion
EX. *If you slam on the brakes of a car while driving, you are likely to break your neck.*

□ break = (as a noun) a crack or other injury; a discontinuation or pause

□ brake = (as a verb) to bring action to a stop EX. *The busdriver braked so suddenly that many students suffered breaks and other sorts of injuries.*

choose/chose/choice

□ choose = present tense (verb) to make a choice □ chose = past tense (verb) already made a choice □ choice = (noun) a decision or selection by preference

EX. *You will have to choose which flavor you want since Sally already chose the vanilla cupcake. Which is your choice?*

coarse/course

□ coarse = not fine or delicate; very rough EX. *The boy used such coarse language that he offended his audience and upset the judges.*

□ course = a path or direction; a subject of study
EX. *A course in public speaking may help the boy to develop more appropriate vocabulary and style for his next attempt.*

desert/dessert

□ desert = (as a noun) hot, dry sandy region with sparse vegetation

□ dessert = (a noun) a sweet such as cake or pie EX. *In the Sahara Desert, an ice cream dessert would quickly melt.*

□ desert = (as a verb) to abandon EX. *The soldier decided to desert the Army when he realized*

he would have to kill innocent civilians.

☐ deserts = (as a noun) usually written as “just deserts” and means “what someone rightly deserves”

EX. The brave soldier was honored with a medal and a parade; he received his just deserts for showing such courage during the terrible battle.

definitely/defiantly

☐ definitely = certainly, surely ☐ defiantly = rebelliously

EX. That rebel definitely behaved defiantly when he refused to do what the police officer told him to do.

fewer/less

• fewer = a countable number (use when you can actually count one by one: fewer pennies)

• less = an overall or general amount, non-countable (use when you refer to something that can't be counted one by one: less money)

EX. Due to parents' increasing concern with good nutrition, fewer students in my second-grade class bring cookies for snack time. Also due to that same concern, many companies are making cookies with less sugar.

its/it's

• its = belonging to it • it's=it is

EX. It's the first day after the snowfall, and already the snow has lost its fresh, clean look.

lose/loose

• lose = to have lost something • loose = free, not fastened

EX. Her bathing cap was too loose, so she had to adjust it so she wouldn't lose it in the pool.

principal/principle

• principal = the person in charge of a school; the main person, thing, or concept; the main amount of money

• principle = a basic truth or standard

EX. Principal Shaw is a person of principle. EX. The principal cause of the fire was a cigarette left

burning near some trash. EX. Being true to yourself is a principle worth trying to live up to.

quiet/quite

- quiet = not loud; hushed • quite = very thoroughly; completely
- EX. *By the time the kids stopped talking and became quiet, the librarian was quite fed up with reminding them to be quiet.*

stationary/stationery

□

□

stationary = unmoving; stays in one place

EX. *When I go to the gym, I use the stationary bike to give my legs a good workout*

stationery = refers to writing paper and envelopes

EX. *My aunt loves to write letters; I bought special stationery for her for her birthday.*

their/there/they're

- their = belonging to them • there = a direction • they're = they are
- EX. *Sam and Barbara told us that they're not recommending a visit to Hawaii to their friends. They had a lot of trouble there. When they tried to call their family at home, a police officer yelled at them: "Hey, you there, move along." They're not used to being bossed around. Their feelings were hurt and they're never going there again.*

then/than

- then = to show time • than = to show comparison

EX. *I just saw a list of the top ten songs and then realized that I have less than half of them on my Ipod.*

to/too/two

- to = a preposition (used with a noun or pronoun) • too = also, very • two = quantity

EX. *"To err is human, to forgive divine" is one of the two phrases that I remember only too well.*

weather/whether

- weather = the stuff that it's doing outside (snow, rain, sunshine) • whether = indicates a choice; whether or not to do something
- EX. *Our ski trip depends on whether the weather is going to cooperate or not.*

wares/where/wear/were/we're

□ wares = items for sale

EX. *The icecream truck drives around selling its tempting wares: popsicles, snow cones, and sundaes that kids love to buy.*

□ Where = place; location EX. *Where in the world is Carmen Sandiego?*

□ wear = to use as clothing or “to wear out from use” EX. *I will wear the uniform, but I think it looks stupid.*

EX. *If you use the pen every day, it will eventually wear out.* □ were = past tense of was

EX. *We were going to buy the uniform until we saw how ugly it was.*

□ we're = contraction for we are EX. *We're not willing to spend money on ugly uniforms!*

who/whom

• who = the subject of a sentence • whom = the object of an action

EX. *"Who requested this book? If I give Bob the school copy, to whom shall I lend my own copy of the book? Who is invited to the party? Whom did you invite to the party?"*

Tip: Try each word with "to" or "for." Whom is the word that makes sense with "to" or "for."

Whose/who's

□ Whose = the possessive form of who □ Who's = a contraction of “who is” and “who has”

EX. *Whose cell phone was left on my desk? EX. Who's going to answer the cell phone when it rings?*

which/who/that

• which = refers to things or animals (not people) • who = refers only to people (not things or animals) • that = refers to people, things, or animals

woman/women

woman = one adult female women = more than one adult female

your/you're

• your = belonging to you • you're = you are

EX. *"I loved your interpretation of a stalk of celery," she gushed. "You're very talented."*