



Confusing Word Pairs and Groups

Several words cause confusion for some writers because they are homonyms, words with similar pronunciations but different spellings and meanings, such as *board* (a plank of wood) and *bored* (uninterested), *weak* (not strong) and *week* (Sunday through Saturday). Most of the words in this appendix are homonyms. Study them and practice using them, as well as the other confusing word pairs and groups listed. Through a conscious effort, you can avoid spelling and incorrect word errors.

A/An/And

- a* adjective used before a word beginning with a consonant or a consonant sound
a map
- an* adjective used before a word beginning with a vowel or a silent *h*
an apple
- and* conjunction joining word, phrases, or clauses
Linda *and* Ruth

Accept/Except

- accept* to receive; to regard as true
She wanted to *accept* the flowers.
- except* other than; excluding; only
All the employees *except* Pat took a trip.

Affect/Effect

- affect* to influence (a verb)
The new benefits *affect* all of us.
- effect* result (a noun)
The storm had a terrible *effect* on Tracy.

Advice/Advise

- advice* opinion or information offered
Mother gave me sound *advice* about selecting a college major.
- advise* to give advice to; counsel
The attorney *advised* him not to sue.

All Ready/Already

all ready wholly prepared
We were *all ready* for the day ahead.

already before or by this or that time
By the time Ron arrived, I had *already* completed the report.

All Together/Altogether

all together considered as a whole
The students marched into the office *all together*.

altogether entirely; completely
He missed the point *altogether*.

Been/Being

been past participle of *to be*
He has *been* the winner several times.

being the *-ing* form of *to be*
The child is *being* helped into a chair.

Brake/Break

brake to cause to stop (verb); device used for slowing or stopping (noun)
The driver had to *brake* suddenly on the ice.
His *brakes* screeched as his car came to a stop.

break to shatter; to come apart into pieces
The glass *breaks* when it falls to the floor.

Breath/Breathe

breath air inhaled and exhaled in breathing (noun)
Her beauty took my *breath* away.

breathe to draw air into the lungs and force it out (verb)
I cannot *breathe* well in this altitude.

Buy/By

buy to purchase
We *buy* new carpet every ten years.

by close to; near; beside
Jack put the flowers *by* the box of candy.

Choose/Chose

choose to select
We *choose* the table near the window.

chose past tense of *choose*
When we were at the mall yesterday, we *chose* to eat pizza.

Complement/Compliment

complement that which completes or makes perfect.
His tie *complements* his suit.

compliment admiration or praise
She received several *compliments* on her presentation.

Conscience/Conscious

conscience recognition of right and wrong
His *conscience* told him not to criticize his partner's decision.

conscious perceiving; aware
I was *conscious* of a stranger staring at me.

Desert/Dessert

desert a hot, dry, sandy region (noun); to abandon (verb)
The *desert* is my favorite vacation spot.
Will they *desert* the bankrupt company?

dessert course at the end of a meal, usually something sweet
The *dessert* was chocolate chip cheesecake.

Farther/Further

farther at or to a more distant point
The boat drifted *farther* from the bank of the river.

further additional; more
Please complete the assignment without *further* delay.

For/Four/Fore

for to the length, extent, or duration of
We will remain *for* the entire opera.

four a cardinal number
Four of us will apply for the job.

fore at or toward the front
I saw only the *fore* part of the ship.

Formerly/Formally

formerly in past time; previously
She was *formerly* our department head.

formally in a manner required by convention
The candidates were *formally* introduced to the selection committee.

Forth/Fourth

- forth* forward; onward
She came *forth* to receive her diploma.
- fourth* a number
The horse placed *fourth* in the race.

Hear/Here

- hear* to perceive sound
I *hear* the doorbell ringing.
- here* at or in this place
Put the schedule *here* on the desk.

It's/Its

- it's* contraction of it is or it has
It's unfortunate that you are ill.
It's been a beautiful, warm day.
- its* possessive pronoun
Business should do *its* part in funding education.

Know/Knew/No/New

- know* to have knowledge or understanding
I *know* how to work the physics problem.
- knew* past tense of *know*
I *knew* how to work the physics problem last night.
- no* certainly not; not so; not any; a negative response
He is *no* longer the director of the school.
- new* recently made or produced, or the like
The patient admired the *new* waiting room.

Lead/Led

- lead* to show the way; to be first (verb); a silver-gray metallic element (noun)
The guide will *lead* us through the ruins.
Lead is used in storage batteries.
- led* past tense of lead (verb)
The path *led* us to a small clearing.

Lie/Lay

- lie* a false statement (noun); to be or place oneself in a reclining position (verb)
If you tell one more *lie*, you will not be able to remember the truth.
I will *lie* in the grass and watch the clouds.
- lay* past tense of *lie*
He *lay* on the sofa until noon.

Lose/Loose

- lose* to have no longer; to suffer loss
Did you *lose* the portfolio I gave you?
- loose* not attached firmly or securely
The doorknob is *loose* and needs to be repaired.

Past/Passed

- past* a previous time; a time gone by
She worries about her *past* mistakes.
- passed* left behind (past tense of pass); attained a certain standard
We *passed* a truck on the highway.
All of the students *passed* the chemistry test.

Patience/Patients

- patience* calm endurance
You have shown great *patience* while he has continued to complain about the situation.
- patients* those undergoing medical care or treatment
The *patients* slowly walked down the hospital corridor.

Peace/Piece

- peace* absence of war
The *peace* between the two nations has long been awaited.
- piece* a detached part; fragment
A *piece* of the puzzle is missing.

Personal/Personnel

- personal* pertaining to a particular person
These are Robert's *personal* belongings.
- personnel* persons employed in a business, service, or public institution
The *personnel* are pleased with the new dental insurance.

Principal/Principle

- principal* money; person in a leading position; most important
No penalty will be subtracted from the *principal* you invested.
The high school *principal* will retire in May.
His *principal* reason for accepting the job was not clear to us.
- principle* fundamental truth; rule of conduct
She refused to compromise her *principles*.

Quiet/Quite

quiet making little or no noise
The audience was *quiet* as the curtain opened.

quite completely; entirely
Dr. Bard's promotion is *quite* an accomplishment.

Raise/Rise

raise to cause to move to a higher level; to lift (transitive verb)
The builders will *raise* the beams.

rise to stand up; to get up (intransitive verb)
He will *rise* from his seat when she enters the room.

Sit/Set

sit to take a sitting position (intransitive verb)
Jonathan *sits* quietly during the lectures.

set to place; to put (transitive verb)
He *set* the glasses on the table.

Sometime/Sometimes/Some Time

sometime at some time in the future
We will hire new faculty *sometime* within the next two years.

sometimes now and then
Sometimes we spend the summer in Aspen.

some time a period of time
The instructor gave the class *some time* to consider the question.

Stationary/Stationery

stationary staying in one place; unchanging
He exercises on a *stationary* bicycle in his bedroom.

stationery writing paper and envelopes
She always uses white or blue *stationery* when she writes to her parents.

Suppose/Supposed

suppose to consider as true; to guess
I *suppose* it will rain this evening.

supposed past tense of suppose
Last year he *supposed* the company would make a profit.

supposed ought; should
+ a form
of to be
Students are *supposed* to be diligent in their studies.

Than/Then

than used after an adjective or adverb to introduce the second part of a comparison
She reads more fiction *than* I do.

then at that time
The nurse covered the sleeping patient, *then* left the room.

Their/There/They're

their possessive form of *they*
Their house is over seventy years old.

there at that place
We walked *there* after dinner.

they're contraction of *they are*
They're going to be late for the meeting.

Thorough/Through/Though

thorough done to the fullest extent
The detectives were *thorough* in their investigation of the murder.

through from the beginning to the end of
He read *through* all his lecture notes in two hours.

though in spite of the fact that
Though I was late for work, I finished my assigned project.

To/Too/Two

to toward
He directed us *to* the exit.

too also; very
She is intelligent and beautiful *too*.
The music is *too* loud.

two a cardinal number
She ate *two* peaches.

Use/Used

use to make use of
We could *use* another warm, sunny day.

used accustomed to (used with *to*)
The students are *used to* Professor Hill's eccentricities.

Weather/Whether

weather atmospheric conditions
The *weather* can change from hot and dry to cold and wet within hours.

whether used to introduce the first of two choices
Whether or not the tax law will affect small businesses remains to be seen.

Were/We're

- were* past tense of *are*
They *were* on their way to the stadium when they had an automobile accident.
- we're* contraction of *we are*
We're not required to take the last test.

Whose/Who's

- whose* possessive form of *who*
Whose farm is this?
- who's* contraction of *who is* or *who has*
Who's the instructor for the history class?

Your/You're

- your* possessive case of *you*
Your new car looks very expensive.
- you're* contraction of *you are*
You will pass the course if *you're* prepared to study and work hard.

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