

# CONFUSED WORDS

Some words sound alike but have different meanings and sometimes different spellings. These words, called homophones, often create confusion in writing. While there are many such words, the following list represents a few of the most common ones that give writers trouble.

## ACCEPT / EXCEPT

Accept is a verb. In other words, someone or something must be doing the accepting.

### Examples:

I accept your proposal of marriage.

That store does not accept credit cards.

Except functions like the word “excluding.”

### Examples:

I like all ice cream flavors except chocolate.

I am free every day except Thursday.

**Hint:** If you want to exclude something, use except because they both start with exc. Accept is an action, both begin with A

## AFFECT / EFFECT

Affect is a verb; someone or something must “affect” something else.

**Example:** That movie affected me quite a bit. (The movie did the affecting.)

Effect mostly functions as a noun. (There must be an affect to have an effect.)

**Example:** That movie had an effect on my sleep. (Effect is a “thing” (noun) that happened as a result of the movie.)

**Hint:** A comes before E, so the Affect (action) must come before the Effect (result)

## ARE / OUR

“Are” is a form of the verb “be” and describes a state of being.

**Example:** We are driving to California next week.

Our is the possessive form of “we.”

**Example:** We are driving to California next week. Our grandparents are meeting us there.

**Hint:** “Our” has a U in it, and YOU like to own stuff.

## CONSCIENCE / CONSCIOUS

Conscience is your inner voice that tells you what is right or wrong.

**Example:** My conscience told me not to stay at that party.

Conscious means to be aware of things around you.

**Examples:** If you are knocked out, you would be unconscious.

I felt self-conscious on my first day of class.

**Hint:** Your inner voice reminds you of the SCIENCE of right and wrong = conSCIENCE

## FARTHER / FURTHER

Farther refers to a distance that can be measured.

**Example:** How much farther do we have to walk?

Further indicates unmeasurable, abstract distance.

**Examples:** I don’t want to talk about this any further.

**Hint:** A = actual (fArther), U = unreal (fUrther)

## FEEL / FILL

Feel means to touch something or have a sensation.

**Examples:** I feel happy when my friends come to visit me.

Fill means to make full.

**Examples:** Please fill that vase with water.

**Hint:** It would not be fun to feel and eel.

## IT'S / ITS

Its is the possessive form of the pronoun "it."

**Example:** The dog lost its collar while we were camping.

It's is the contraction for "it is."

**Example:** It's not too late to change your mind.

The source of confusion here is that we think an apostrophe is used to show possession (Bob's car). While this is true, the word "its" is already a possessive word by nature, like the words "his" or "her." One does not need to make it possessive with an apostrophe.

## LAY / LIE

Lay is a verb and must be accompanied by an object.

**Example:** Lay the paper down on the desk.

Lie means "to recline."

**Example:** You should go lie down on the bed.

**Hint:** lAy = plAce, lIe = reclIne. (Don't be confused that the past tense of lie is lay.)

## LOOSE / LOSE

Loose is the opposite of tight.

**Example:** The lid on the jar is loose.

Lose is the present form of lost.

**Example:** Stay close so we don't lose you in the crowd.

**Hint:** Lose lost an O because it was loose.

## OF / HAVE

Be careful whenever could of, should of, would of, might of, or must of appear in your writing. It almost always indicates an incorrect use of the contraction for have: could've, should've, would've, might've, must've.

**Incorrect:** I could of won if that guy hadn't tripped me.

**Correct:** I could have (could've) won if that guy hadn't tripped me.

**Incorrect:** I should of gone to Hawaii with my friends.

**Correct:** I should've (should have) gone to Hawaii with my friends.

**Hint:** Remember that you're really using a contraction: could've, should've, would've, might've, must've

## PASSED / PAST

Passed means "to move forward."

**Example:** I passed that car on the freeway yesterday.

Past refers to time

**Example:** There is something suspicious about her past.

Past also indicates "beyond."

**Example:** Go past the next light, and then turn right.

**Hint:** Passed is the past tense (referring to time) of pass. pass + ed.

## PRINCIPAL / PRINCIPLE

Principal is the person in charge of your school.

**Example:** The principal will direct the assembly today.

Principle is something that controls your actions.

**Example:** I won't lie to you because it is against my principles.

**Hint:** The princIPAL is your pal.

## SENSE / SINCE

Sense relates to perception

**Examples:**

I sense your frustration.

Sixth sense, intelligence, and reason use common sense.

That doesn't make sense.

Sense is also a "feel" for how something works

**Examples:**

Sense of humor

Sense of justice

Since relates to time.

**Example:** We haven't eaten since noon.

Since also means because.

**Example:** Since we haven't eaten, let's take a lunch break.

**Hint:** Your six sEnses include your EyEs and Ears (both have Es). SInce has and I just like tIme.

## THAN / THEN

Than indicates comparison: better than, worse than, taller than, colder than, etc...

**Example:** I like apples more than oranges.

Then indicates sequence or consequence: First \_\_\_\_ then \_\_\_\_\_. If \_\_\_\_, then\_\_\_\_\_.

**Examples:**

We went to the store then the post office.

If you don't study for the test, then you won't pass this class.

**Hint:** The word compAre contains the letter A just like thAn. The words sequEnce and consequEnce contain the letter E just like thEn.

## THEIR / THERE / THEY'RE

Their shows possession.

**Example:** I just love their new car.

There indicates place or existence.

**Examples:**

Put the cup right there. (indicates place)

There is a problem. (indicates existence)

They're is a contraction of the words they are.

**Example:** They're the nicest people you will ever meet.

**Hint:** Does it make sense if you "un-contract" it? If so, use "they're". They are the nicest people you will ever meet. (It makes sense, so they're is correct.) I just love they are new car. (Does not make sense.) **Hint:** The word their has an "I" in it, and "I" like to possess things. Use their for possession.

## TO / TOO

Too means also or indicates an excess of something.

**Example:** I like to go to the movies too. (also)

**Example:** That movie had too much violence. (excess)

To should be used in all other cases.

**Hint:** too has an excessive o.

**Hint:** Does it make sense if you “un-contract” it? If so, use “who’s.” Alos, imagine asking, “wHOSE HOSE is this?”

## WEATHER / WHETHER

Weather relates to the sun, rain, and clouds.

**Example:** I hope the weather is nice today.

Whether introduces an option.

**Example:** It doesn’t matter whether or not you agree with me.

**Hint:** Picture the weather (a tornado) shouting, “I want to EAT-HER!” = w-EAT-HER

## WEAR / WHERE

Wear relates to clothing or carrying anything upon one’s person.

**Example:** I usually don’t wear earrings.

Where indicates place.

**Example:** I want to live where wild animals roam free.

**Hint:** wEAR = you are wearing EARings. wHERE refers to a place, just like HERE.

## WERE / WE’RE

Were is a past tense form of the verb to be.

**Example:** We were at the party together last night.

We’re is a contraction of we are.

**Example:** We’re going to win the lottery any day now.

**Hint:** Does it make sense if you “un-contract” it? If so, use “we’re.”

## WHOSE / WHO’S

Whose shows possession.

**Example:** Whose jacket is this?

Who’s is a contraction for who is.

**Example:** Who’s going to the movie with me?