Commonly Confused Words
Commonly Confused Words

1. **Accept** and **Except**
2. **Advice** and **Advise**
3. **Affect** and **Effect**
4. **Choose** and **Chose**
5. **It's** and **Its**
6. **Lead** and **Led**
7. **Loose** and **Lose**
8. **Past** and **Passed**
9. **Personal** and **Personnel**
10. **Principal** and **Principle**
11. **Quite** and **Quiet**
12. **Then** and **Than**
13. **There**, **Their**, and **They're**
14. **Through** and **Threw**
15. **To**, **Two**, and **Too**
16. **Use** and **Used to**
17. **Weather** and **Whether**
18. **Whose** and **Who's**
19. **Where**, **Wear**, **Were** and **We're**
20. **Your** and **You're**
21. **Regardless** and **Irregardless**
22. **Farther** and **Further**
23. **Fewer** and **Less**
24. **Off** and **Off of**
25. **Alternate** and **Alternative**
26. **Among** and **Between**
27. **Lay** and **Lie**
Even More Confusing Words: one word or two?

1. **Already** and **All ready**
2. **Awhile** and **A while**
3. **Allot** and **A lot**
4. **Alright** and **All right**
Similar Forms with Different Meanings

1. Anyone and Any one
2. Anyway and Any way
3. Maybe and May be
More Complex Words

1. Which, that, and who

Commonly Confused Pronouns

1. Who and Whom
2. I and Me
Accept

Verb

Except

Preposition
Accept

Verb

I accept your gift.

Except

Preposition

Everyone except little Johnny is going.
Advice

Noun

Advise

Verb

Table of Contents
Advice

Noun

My advice to you is to stop sucking your thumb.

Advise

Verb

I advise you not to eat the pungent fruit.
Affect
Verb

Effect
Noun
Affect

Verb

Your perfume affects me.

Effect

Noun

The effect of his monotonous voice was to put them to sleep.
Choose

*Verb* (present tense)

Chose

*Verb* (past tense)

Table of Contents
Choose

Verb (present tense)

I choose to go to the store today.

Chose

Verb (past tense)

I chose not to go to the store yesterday.
It’s

The short form of it is or it has.

Its

Possessive pronoun
It’s

The short form of *it is* or *it has*.

*It’s* a ghost!

Its

Possessive pronoun

The monkey hit *its* head.
It’s
The short form of **it is** or **it has**.

It’s a ghost!

Its
Possessive pronoun

The monkey hit **its** head.

If you still don’t know which word to use, read the sentence with “it is”. If the sentence makes sense with “it is”, use **it’s**.
Lead

**Noun** (a type of metal)

And

**Verb**

Led

**Verb** (past tense of lead)
Lead

Noun (a type of metal)

Pencils used to be made of lead.

AND

Verb

I lead tours through this maddening maze.

Led

Verb (past tense of lead)

They led me down the garden path.
Loose

Adjective

Lose

Verb
Loose

Adjective

His pants were so loose that they fell down during his speech.

Lose

Verb

I lose my head when you smile at me.
Past  
Noun

Passed  
Verb (past tense of pass)

AND

Preposition
Past

Noun

Historical events happened in the past.

AND

Preposition

The postal worker walks nervously past the dog pound.

Passed

Verb (past tense of pass)

Elvis passed his brother on the road.
Personal
Adjective

Personnel
Noun

Table of Contents
If you want to, you can use my *personal* computer.

The boss is unhappy since his *personnel* are annoyed.
Principal

Noun

AND

Adjective

Principle

Noun

Table of Contents
Principal

Noun
a) The principal is the head manager in a public school.

b) The principal of the school is bald.

AND

Adjective
a) You can also have one principal (or main) belief.

b) The principal reason for my leaving was the bad odor.

Principle

Noun
It is against my principles to join that club.
Quite
Adverb

Quiet
Adjective

Table of Contents
I am quite sick of this silly software package.

The room was so quiet that everybody heard my stomach rumble.
Then
Adverb

Than
Comparative word
Then

Adverb

I fell and landed on my head, and then it started to hurt.

Than

Comparative word

Dolphins are smarter than people.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>There</th>
<th>Their</th>
<th>They’re</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shows direction, a destination, or a location</td>
<td>Possessive pronoun and shows ownership</td>
<td>Short form of they are</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There

Shows direction, a destination, or a location

a) The books are over there.

b) There is a pen in the drawer.

Their

Possessive pronoun and shows ownership

All the children have lost their mittens.

They’re

Short form of they are

They’re back!
Through

Preposition

Threw

Verb (past tense)
Through

Preposition

I went through the door and saw a ghost.

Threw

Verb (past tense)

You threw the ball through the window, so you will have to fix it.
To
Preposition

Two
A number

Too
Adverb
I went to the zoo, and the baboon hit on me.

There are two wolverines in the kitchen, and they’re eating your pumpkin pie.

The fox tried to reach the grapes, but they were too high.
**Use**

Verb

**Used to**

a) Express something that is no longer true.

b) Express becoming accustomed to something

**Used**

Adjective

**AND**

Verb (past tense of use)
Use

Verb

I need to use the vacuum cleaner; my house is a mess.

Used to

a) Express something that is no longer true.

When I was a child, I used to play with marbles.

b) Express becoming accustomed to something

I am used to driving long distances.

Used

Adjective

I have several used books.

AND

Verb (past tense of use)

I used the vacuum yesterday to clean the carpets.
Weather

Noun

Whether

Conjunction
The **weather** today will be hot and humid.

I don’t know **whether** or not aliens will visit us one day.
Whose  
Possessive pronoun

Who’s  
Short form of who is
Whose
Possessive pronoun

Whose feather boa was thrown across the room?

Who’s
Short form of who is

Knock knock. Who’s there?
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Where</th>
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<th>Were</th>
<th>We’re</th>
</tr>
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<td>Contraction for we are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are you going?</td>
<td>I will not wear any pink clothing.</td>
<td>They were glad that exams were over.</td>
<td>We’re happy to share information about the pink flamingo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Your  Possessive pronoun

You’re  Contraction for you are
Your
Possessive pronoun
Is your fridge still running?

You’re
Contraction for you are
You’re nuts!
Regardless

Adverb

Meaning: despite or notwithstanding

Irregardless
Regardless

Adverb
Meaning: despite or notwithstanding

I'll do it regardless of the consequences.
Regardless

Adverb
Meaning: despite or notwithstanding

I’ll do it regardless of the consequences.

Irregardless

NOT a valid word in English

DO NOT USE IT!
Farther

Adverb
Meaning: a greater distance - usually physical

Further

Adverb
Meaning: Additional; to a greater extent
Farther

Adverb
Meaning: a greater distance - usually physical

The mall was farther away than I thought.

Further

Adverb
Meaning: Additional; to a greater extent

I’ll make further inquiries in the morning.
Fewer

Adverb
Used to compare numbers

Less

Adverb
Used to compare quantity
Fewer

Adverb
Used to compare numbers

There are fewer boys than girls at the party.

Less

Adverb
Used to compare quantity

There is less snow this winter than last.
Off

Adverb

Meaning: from
Off

Adverb
Meaning: from

I hurt myself when I fell off the chair.
Off

Adverb
Meaning: from

I hurt myself when I fell off the chair.

Off of

NOT a valid word in English

DO NOT use it!
Alternate

Adjective
Meaning: Every second one

Alternative

Adjective
Meaning: Other possibilities
Alternate

Adjective
Meaning: Every second one

We washed the car on alternate Sundays.

Alternative

Adjective
Meaning: Other possibilities

We took the alternative route home.
Among

Preposition
Meaning: to be surrounded by something

Between

Preposition
Meaning: involves only two things or two persons
Among

Preposition
Meaning: to be surrounded by something

Among all my discs, this one is my favourite.

Between

Preposition
Meaning: involves only two things or two persons

Between the two, I like this one better.
Lay

Needs an object after it.

Lie

Doesn’t need an object.
Lay

Needs an object after it.

a) Lay the books on the table.

b) She laid the octopus into the pot.

Lie

 Doesn’t need an object.

a) If you are tired, you should lie down and relax.

b) Abandoned flying saucers were lying in the desert.

c) The cat lay in the sun, charging itself for another busy night.

d) The papers have lain on the desk for several days.
Lay

Needs an object after it.

a) Lay the books on the table.
   Put the books on the table.

b) She laid the octopus into the pot.
   She placed the octopus into the pot.

If you’re not sure of when to use lay, try replacing it with place or put.

Lie

Doesn’t need an object.

a) If you are tired, you should lie down and relax.

b) Abandoned flying saucers were lying in the desert.

c) The cat lay in the sun, charging itself for another busy night.

d) The papers have lain on the desk for several days.
Even More Confusing Words
Already
Adverb

All ready
Adjective
Already

Adverb

I am already sore from the work out.

All ready

Adjective

We are all ready to leave.
Awhile

Adverb
Meaning: For a short time

A While

A paired article and noun
Meaning: A period of time
Awhile

Adverb
Meaning: For a short time

I guess I can stay awhile longer.

A While

A paired article and noun
Meaning: A period of time

We went to the event but after a while, we left.
Allot

 Meaning: When you give out a portion of something, you allot it to different individuals.

A lot

 ALWAYS spelled as TWO words.
Allot

Meaning: When you give out a portion of something, you allot it to different individuals.

We allotted 6 pieces of cake for Monday’s dessert and 4 for Tuesday’s.

A lot

ALWAYS spelled as TWO words.

A lot of people are coming to the party.
Alright

Meaning: Satisfactory; acceptable

All right

It should ALWAYS be spelled as TWO words.
Alright

Meaning: Satisfactory; acceptable

a) Alright, I’m on my way.

b) We are alright.

All right

It should **ALWAYS** be spelled as **TWO** words.

a) All right, I’m on my way.

b) We are all right.

These words have the **same meaning**!
If you’re concerned about the spelling, it’s best to spell the word as two words.
Similar Forms with Different Meanings
Anyone

Pronoun
Meaning: Any person at all

Any one

A paired adjective and noun
Meaning: A specific item in a group
Anyone

Pronoun
Meaning: Any person at all

Anyone who can solve this problem deserves an award.

Any one

A paired adjective and noun
Meaning: A specific item in a group

Any one of those papers could serve as an example.
Anyway

Adverb
Meaning: In any case or nonetheless

Any way

Adjective and noun
Meaning: Any particular course, direction, or manner
Anyway

Adverb
Meaning: In any case or nonetheless

He objected, but she went anyway.

Any way

Adjective and noun
Meaning: Any particular course, direction, or manner

Any way we chose would lead to danger.
Maybe

Adverb
Meaning: perhaps

May be
Verb (a form of be)
Maybe

Adverb

Meaning: perhaps

Maybe we should wait until the rain stops.

May be

Verb (a form of be)

This may be our only chance to win the championship.
More Complex Words
That, Which, and Who

Compare these two sentences:

1. The keys have been found.
2. The keys that I lost last month have been found.
That, Which, and Who

Compare these two sentences:

1. The keys have been found.  Vague and puzzling
2. The keys **that** I lost last month have been found.  **That** is an essential part of the sentence
That / Which / Who

1. Refers to animate and inanimate nouns
That / Which / Who

1. Refers to animate and inanimate nouns

a) Many of the stones that were used to build the pyramids weighed several tonnes.

b) The negotiator made an offer that/which was very attractive to the union.
That / Which / Who

1. Refers to animate and inanimate nouns

a) Many of the stones that were used to build the pyramids weighed several tonnes.

b) The negotiator made an offer that/which was very attractive to the union.

You can usually substitute *that* for *who(m) / which*
That / Which / Who

2. That can sometimes be omitted when it is used as an object.
2. *That* can sometimes be omitted when it is used as an object.

   a) The garage *that* we take our car to is very reliable.

   b) The films *that* Chaplin made have become classics.
That / Which / Who

2. *That* can sometimes be omitted when it is used as an object.

   a) The garage *that* we take our car to is very reliable.  
      The garage we take our car to is very reliable.

   b) The films *that* Chaplin made have become classics.
That / Which / Who

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a) The garage *that* we take our car to is very reliable.
   The garage we take our car to is very reliable.

b) The films *that* Chaplin made have become classics.
   The films Chaplin made have become classics.
That / Which / Who

3. *That* is usually omitted, especially when the dependent clause begins with a **personal pronoun** (he, she, etc.) or a **proper name** (Sally, John, etc.).
That / Which / Who

3. *That* is usually omitted, especially when the dependent clause begins with a **personal pronoun** (he, she, etc.) or a **proper name** (Sally, John, etc.).

a) She said *that* they would arrive in separate cars.
That / Which / Who

3. *That* is usually omitted, especially when the dependent clause begins with a **personal pronoun** (he, she, etc.) or a **proper name** (Sally, John, etc.).

a) She said *that* they would arrive in separate cars.
   
   **She** said they would arrive in separate cars.
When do I use *who*?

When do I use *that*?

When do I use *who*?

When do I use *that*?
When do I use *who*?

When do I use *that*?

**When do I use *who***?

Use *who* when referring to people, and individuality is important.

**When do I use *that***?

Use *that* for people when a class, type, or species is meant.
When do I use **who**?

When do I use **that**?

**When do I use **who**?**

Use **who** when referring to people, and individuality is important.

a) She is the only one of the managers **who** can speak Japanese fluently.

**When do I use **that**?**

Use **that** for people when a class, type, or species is meant.
When do I use *who*?

When do I use *that*?

**When do I use *who***?

Use *who* when referring to people, and individuality is important.

a) She is the only one of the managers who can speak Japanese fluently.

**When do I use *that***?

Use *that* for people when a class, type, or species is meant.

a) He is the kind of student that should use the Writing Centre.
Commonly Confused Pronouns
Who

Refers to the **subject** of the sentence.

Whom

Refers to the **direct object** in the sentence.
Who

Refers to the **subject** of the sentence.

a) **Who** are you to dress like that?!

b) **Who** is calling you at this time of night?!
   John is calling me.

Whom

Refers to the **direct object** in the sentence.

a) **Whom** are you going to see tonight?
   I am going to see **him**.
Who

Refers to the **subject** of the sentence.

a) Who are you to dress like that?!

b) Who is calling you at this time of night?!

John is calling me.

---

Whom

Refers to the **direct object** in the sentence.

a) Whom are you going to see tonight?

I am going to see him.

---

**How do I know when to use whom?**

Ask yourself if the answer to the question would be **he** or **him**. If the answer is **him**, use **whom**.
I

Refers to the **subject** of the sentence.

Me

Refers to the **object** of the sentence.
I

Refers to the **subject** of the sentence.

I ate the cookies that Becky made.

Me

Refers to the **object** of the sentence.

Becky gave the cookies to me.
Quiz: Commonly Confused Words

1. Affects or Effects - The weather __________ my mood.

2. Past or Passed - The nightingale flew __________ my window.

3. Principles or Principals - I refuse to follow orders that go against my __________.

4. Then or Than - He would rather go without food __________ go without beer.

5. Their or There - All the students brought __________ cell phones to class.

6. Use or Used - We will never be able to get __________ to waiting for a bus in freezing weather.

7. Lay or Lie - The first thing I want to do when I get home is __________ on my couch.

8. Me or I - The teacher gave bonus points to Sam and __________.
Quiz: Commonly Confused Words

1. Affects or Effects - The weather ________ my mood.
   - affects

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   - affects

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   - past

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   - principles

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4. Then or Than - He would rather go without food _______ go without beer. than
5. Their or There - All the students brought _______ cell phones to class. their
6. Use or Used - We will never be able to get _______ to waiting for a bus in freezing weather. used
7. Lay or Lie - The first thing I want to do when I get home is _______ on my couch. lie
8. Me or I - The teacher gave bonus points to Sam and _______. me
THAT’S IT!

If you’ve found this helpful, please speak to one of the Writing Centre tutors to find out how you can view these slides on your own time.

Have any questions? Please visit the Writing Centre in F201.