

# *Commonly Confused Words*

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**W**ords that sound alike or nearly alike but have different meanings often cause writers trouble. Here are a few of the most common pairs with correct definitions and examples:

- **ACCEPT**-to receive  
He accepts defeat well.

**EXCEPT**-to take or leave out  
Please take all the books off the shelf except for the red one.

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- **AFFECT**-to influence  
Lack of sleep affects the quality of your work.

**EFFECT**-n., result, v., to accomplish  
The subtle effect of the lighting made the room look ominous.

Can the university effect such a change without disrupting classes?

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- **A LOT** (two words)-many.

**ALOT** (one word)-Not the correct form.

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- **ALLUSION**-an indirect reference  
The professor made an allusion to Virginia Woolf's work.

**ILLUSION**-a false perception of reality  
They saw a mirage: that is a type of illusion one sees in the desert.

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- **ALL READY**-prepared  
Dinner was all ready when the guests arrived.



ALREADY-by this time  
The turkey was already burned when the guests arrived.

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- ALTOGETHER-entirely  
Altogether, I thought that the student's presentation was well planned.

ALL TOGETHER-gathered, with everything in one place  
We were all together at the family reunion last spring.

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- APART-to be separated  
The chain-link fence kept the angry dogs apart. OR My old car fell apart before we reached California.

A PART-to be joined with  
The new course was a part of the new field of study at the university. OR A part of this plan involves getting started at dawn.

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- ASCENT- climb  
The plane's ascent made my ears pop.

ASSENT-agreement  
The martian assented to undergo experiments.

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- BREATH-noun, air inhaled or exhaled  
You could see his breath in the cold air.

BREATHE-verb, to inhale or exhale  
If you don't breathe, then you are dead.

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- CAPITAL-seat of government. Also financial resources.  
The capital of Virginia is Richmond.

The firm had enough capital to build the new plant.



CAPITOL-the actual building in which the legislative body meets  
The governor announced his resignation in a speech given at the capitol today.

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- CITE-to quote or document  
I cited ten quotes from the same author in my paper.

SIGHT-vision  
The sight of the American flag arouses different emotions in different parts of the world.

SITE-position or place  
The new office building was built on the site of a cemetery.

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- COMPLEMENT-noun, something that completes; verb, to complete  
A nice dry white wine complements a seafood entree.

COMPLIMENT-noun, praise; verb, to praise  
The professor complimented Betty on her proper use of a comma.

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- CONSCIENCE-sense of right and wrong  
The student's conscience kept him from cheating on the exam.

CONSCIOUS-awake  
I was conscious when the burglar entered the house.

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- COUNCIL-a group that consults or advises  
The men and women on the council voted in favor of an outdoor concert in their town.

COUNSEL-to advise  
The parole officer counseled the convict before he was released.

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- ELICIT-to draw or bring out  
The teacher elicited the correct response from the student.



ILLICIT-illegal

The Columbian drug lord was arrested for his illicit activities.

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- EMINENT-famous, respected  
The eminent podiatrist won the Physician of the Year award.

IMMANENT-inherent or intrinsic

The meaning of the poem was immanent, and not easily recognized.

IMMINENT-ready to take place

A fight between my sister and me is imminent from the moment I enter my house.

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- ITS-of or belonging to it  
The baby will scream as soon as its mother walks out of the room.

IT'S-contraction for it is

It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood.

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- LEAD-noun, a type of metal  
Is that pipe made of lead?

LED-verb, past tense of the verb "to lead"

She led the campers on an over-night hike.

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- LIE-to lie down (a person or animal. *hint: people can tell lies*)  
I have a headache, so I'm going to lie down for a while.

*(also lying, lay, has/have lain--The dog has lain in the shade all day; yesterday, the dog lay there for twelve hours).*

LAY-to lay an object down.

"Lay down that gun, Bubba!" The sheriff demanded.

The town lay at the foot of the mountain.

*(also laying, laid, has/have laid--At that point, Bubba laid the gun on the ground).*

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- LOSE--verb, to misplace or not win  
Mom glared at Mikey. "If you lose that new lunchbox, don't even think of coming home!"

LOOSE--noun, to not be tight; verb (rarely used)--to release

The burglar's pants were so loose that he was sure to lose the race with the cop chasing him.

While awaiting trial, he was never set loose from jail because no one would post his bail.

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- NOVEL-noun, a book that is a work of fiction. Do not use "novel" for nonfiction; use "book" or "work."  
Mark Twain wrote his novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* when he was already well known, but before he published many other works of fiction and nonfiction.
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- PASSED-verb, past tense of "to pass," to have moved  
The tornado passed through the city quickly, but it caused great damage.

PAST-belonging to a former time or place

Who was the past president of Microsquish Computers?

Go past the fire station and turn right.

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- PRECEDE-to come before  
Pre-writing precedes the rough draft of good papers.

PROCEED-to go forward

He proceeded to pass back the failing grades on the exam.

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- PRINCIPAL-adjective, most important; noun, a person who has authority  
The principal ingredient in chocolate chip cookies is chocolate chips.

The principal of the school does the announcements each morning.

PRINCIPLE-a general or fundamental truth

The study was based on the principle of gravity.



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- QUOTE-verb, to cite  
I would like to quote Dickens in my next paper.

QUOTATION-noun, the act of citing  
The book of famous quotations inspired us all.

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- STATIONARY-standing still  
The accident was my fault because I ran into a stationary object.

STATIONERY-writing paper  
My mother bought me stationery that was on recycled paper.

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- SUPPOSED TO-correct form for "to be obligated to" or "presumed to" NOT "suppose to"

SUPPOSE-to guess or make a conjecture  
Do you suppose we will get to the airport on time? When is our plane supposed to arrive? We are supposed to check our bags before we board, but I suppose we could do that at the curb and save time.

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- THAN-use with comparisons  
I would rather go out to eat than eat at the dining hall.

THEN-at that time, or next  
I studied for my exam for seven hours, and then I went to bed.

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- THEIR-possessive form of they  
Their house is at the end of the block.

THERE-indicates location (hint: think of "here and there")  
There goes my chance of winning the lottery!

THEY'RE-contraction for "they are"  
They're in Europe for the summer--again!

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- **THROUGH**-by means of; finished; into or out of  
He plowed right through the other team's defensive line.

**THREW**-past tense of throw  
She threw away his love love letters.

**THOROUGH**-careful or complete  
John thoroughly cleaned his room; there was not even a speck of dust when he finished.

**THOUGH**-however; nevertheless  
He's really a sweetheart though he looks tough on the outside.

**THRU**-abbreviated slang for through; not appropriate in standard writing  
We're thru for the day!

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- **TO**-toward  
I went to the University of Richmond.

**TOO**-also, or excessively  
He drank too many screwdrivers and was unable to drive home.

**TWO**-a number  
Only two students did not turn in the assignment.

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- **WHO**-pronoun, referring to a person or persons  
Jane wondered how Jack, who is so smart, could be having difficulties in Calculus.

**WHICH**-pronoun, replacing a singular or plural thing(s);not used to refer to persons  
Which section of history did you get into?

**THAT**-used to refer to things or a group or class of people  
I lost the book that I bought last week.

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- **WHO**-used as a subject or as a subject complement (see above)  
John is the man who can get the job done.

**WHOM**-used as an object  
Whom did Sarah choose as her replacement?

