

Commonly Misused Words

English has many word pairs that sound similar but are spelled (slightly) differently and mean different things. They are frequently mistaken for one another. Let's learn to do better. The following are some of those. You can look them up online or in the textbook starting on p. 313 (Appendix Part 3: Glossary of Commonly Misused Words and Phrases).

1. Acute / chronic
2. Affect / effect
3. Among / between / amid
4. Compliment / complement
5. Continuous / continual
6. Convince / persuade
7. Discrete / discreet
8. e.g. / i.e. (exempli gratia / id est) = (for example / that is)
9. ensure / insure
10. farther / further
11. Fewer / less
12. flout / flaunt
13. infer / imply
14. It's / its
15. licence / license
16. lie / lay
17. peak / peek / pique
18. Principle / principal
19. Stationary / stationery
20. They're / their / there
21. To/too/two

Exercise Sentences

In each sentence, circle, underline, or highlight the word that you think is correct in the sentence.

My plan did not have the affect/effect that I had hoped.

The new policy will affect/effect employee morale.

The medication had a positive affect/effect on her health.

Their/They're car broke down on the highway.

I left my keys over their/there on the table.

Their/They're going to the party together.

Is this their/there cat?

I saw them standing over their/there.

Is this your/you're book?

Your/You're going to love the movie.

The dog wagged its/it's tail.

Its/It's fur was soft to the touch.

Its/It's a beautiful day outside.

The computer lost its/it's connection to the internet.

I'll see you than/then.

She is taller then/than her brother.

I will accept/except your offer.

Everyone accept/except Sarah attended the meeting.

The red shoes complement/compliment her dress perfectly.

He received a nice complement/compliment on his presentation.

She received a lovely complement/compliment on her dress.

The wine perfectly complimented/complemented the meal.

The school principal/principle greeted the students.

Honesty is an important principal/principle.

She adheres to a strict moral principal/principle.

Sorting information into context, details, and next step is the main principal/principle I want you to learn.

Sorting information into context, details, and next step is the principal/principle purpose of the assignment.

I will lay/lie down for a nap.

Please lay/lie the napkins on the table.

He likes to lay/lie in the sun on warm days.

Please lay/lie the blanket on the bed.

Please lay/lie down on the couch.

The cat loves to lay/lie in the sunshine.

The store is farther/further down the road.

We need to discuss this farther/further.

The house is located farther/further from the city centre.

We need to investigate farther/further before making a decision.

The car remained stationary/stationery at the red light.

She bought some new stationary/stationery for her office.

The sudden headache was acute/chronic.

The patient's condition is acute/chronic and will require a lifetime of medication.

He stood amid/among the crowd.

The secret was shared among/between the two friends.

They continued their conversation amid/among the chaos.

The couple love each other/one another very much.

The team respect each other/one another very much.

The children interrupted their parents' gathering continually/continuously.

The rain was continual/continuous throughout the day.

She made continual/continuous efforts to improve her skills.

The generator was powered by the continual/continuous flow of the stream.

He tried to convince/persuade her to join the team.

She was convinced/persuaded to change her mind.

Can I convince/persuade you to look at the desert menu?

He tried to convince/persuade me that graphic novels were the height of modern art.

The data was divided into discreet/discrete categories.

He was discreet/discrete about his plans to surprise her.

Gating theory is taught as part of discreet/discrete mathematics.

She loves all fruits (e.g./i.e., apples, bananas).

Please bring your essentials to the ticket counter (e.g./i.e., passport, airplane ticket).

He took measures to ensure/insure the safety of the passengers.

She decided to insure/ensure her car against accidents.

From her tone, he could infer/imply that she was upset.

His words seemed to infer/imply that he knew more than he was saying.

They reached the peak/peek of the mountain.

She took a quick peak/peek inside the box.

His curiosity was peaked/piqued by the mysterious letter.

He obtained a driver's licence/license last week.

Are we going to licence/license this?

He chose to flaunt/flout the rules and regulations.

She liked to flaunt/flout her wealth with extravagant purchases.

The car remained stationary/stationery at the traffic light.

She bought some new stationary/stationery for her office.

I stood stationary/stationery in the stationary/stationery store.

There are fewer/less people at the party than last year.

She decided to consume fewer/less sugar as part of her new year's resolutions.