

Commonly Misspelled Words

Some words look or sound alike, and it's easy to become confused about which one to use. Here is a list of the most common of these confusing word pairs:

Accept, Except	<p><i>Accept</i> means <i>to approve of</i> or <i>to receive willingly</i>.</p> <p><i>Except</i> means <i>but</i> or <i>excluding</i>.</p> <p>This sentence might help you remember the difference (the capitalized letters show similarities in spelling):</p> <p>I'll <u>A</u>cc<u>ep</u>t <u>A</u>dv<u>ic</u>e from anybody <u>E</u>X<u>cept</u> my <u>E</u>X-wife.</p>
Advice, Advise	<p>The <i>s</i> in <i>advise</i> is pronounced like <i>z</i>.</p> <p><i>Advise</i> is always a verb.</p> <p>I'd advise you not to go.</p> <p><i>Advice</i> is never a verb.</p> <p>I took his adv<u>I</u><u>C</u>E about the thin <u>i</u><u>c</u>e.</p>
Affect, Effect	<p><i>Affect</i> is almost always a verb. It means <i>to have an influence on</i>.</p> <p>Spring pollen always <i>affects</i> my sinuses.</p> <p><i>Effect</i> is almost always a noun. If you can put <i>a</i>, <i>an</i>, or <i>the</i> in front of it, spell it <i>effect</i>.</p> <p>The <i>effect</i> of spring pollen is often severe.</p>
All ready, Already	<p><i>All</i> means <i>completely</i>. If you can say completely ready or just ready, use all ready.</p> <p>I'm all ready for bed. ("I'm completely ready for bed," or "I'm ready for bed," say the same thing.)</p> <p>Use <i>already</i> if you can't leave off the all or say completely and have it make sense.</p> <p>I've already told you five times.</p>
All right	<p><i>All right</i> is the only form that is acceptable. Always spell it <i>all right</i>. All right?</p>
A lot	<p><i>A lot</i> is the only form that is acceptable. Always spell it as two words: <i>a lot</i>.</p>
Are, our	<p><i>Are</i> is always a verb.</p> <p>We <i>are</i> having fun.</p> <p><i>Our</i> means something <i>belongs to us</i>.</p> <p>We like <i>our</i> new car.</p>
Brake, break	<p>The <i>brake</i> is what you push to slow your car or what you do when you push that pedal.</p> <p>Put on your <i>brakes</i>; there's a stop sign ahead.</p> <p>Don't <i>brake</i> hard on icy roads.</p> <p><i>Break</i> tells what happens to the glass that you drop. It means <i>to shatter</i> or <i>to end</i>. <i>Break</i> also means <i>a pause</i>.</p> <p>The glass will <i>break</i> on that concrete floor.</p> <p>You'll <i>break</i> her heart if you break your engagement.</p> <p>Isn't it time for our coffee <i>break</i>?</p>
Choose, chose	<p><i>Choose</i> is present tense; <i>chose</i> is past.</p> <p>You must <i>choose</i> one of these gifts right now.</p> <p>Yesterday I <i>chose</i> not to go to school.</p>

Clothes, cloths	<p>You wear <i>clothes</i>, but you use <i>cloths</i>. She always wears nice <i>clothes</i>. Use only soft <i>cloths</i> on your camera lens.</p>
Coarse, course	<p>Something that is <i>coarse</i> is rough or not fine. Burlap is a very <i>coarse</i> cloth. Use <i>coarse</i> sandpaper on that rough board. That ground pepper is a little too <i>coarse</i> for my taste. Use <i>course</i> for all other meanings. Did the river change its <i>course</i>? Of <i>course</i> it did. I learned that in my geology <i>course</i>.</p>
Complement, compliment	<p><i>Complement</i> with an <i>e</i> means to complete something (as an outfit) or to make it perfect (as in a perfect combination). That hat is the perfect <i>complement</i> to my new suit. <i>Compliment</i> with an <i>i</i> means to say nice things or praise. Be sure to <i>compliment</i> him on his hat. That's the nicest <i>compliment</i> I've ever received. Remember that a compl<u>e</u>ment comple<u>e</u>tes something and that I l<u>i</u>ke a compl<u>i</u>ment.</p>
Conscience, conscious	<p>Your <i>conscience</i> is that little inner voice that tells you when you're doing wrong. My <i>conscience</i> wouldn't let me lie to you. If you are <i>conscious</i>, you are <i>awake</i> and <i>aware</i>. The boxer was no longer <i>conscious</i>. She was suddenly <i>conscious</i> of someone else's presence. If you are c<u>o</u>ns<u>c</u>i<u>o</u>us, both your eyes are probably open, and the two <i>o</i>'s can remind you of two open eyes. If your co<u>n</u>scie<u>n</u>ce says something to you, it's probably "<u>N</u>o, <u>N</u>o" and the two <i>n</i>'s can help you remember that spelling.</p>
Desert, dessert	<p>A <i>dessert</i> is what you eat after dinner. It is <u>S</u>o <u>S</u>weet that you want a second helping. I'm gaining weight, so I shouldn't eat <i>dessert</i>. <i>Desert</i> is used for all other meanings. The <i>desert</i> is a hot, dry place. He hated the army and wanted to <i>desert</i>.</p>
Do, due	<p>To <i>do</i> is to <i>act</i>. I <i>do</i> many things during the day. If you <i>do</i> that again, you'll be in trouble. What did he <i>do</i> to the car to make it run? <i>Due</i> means <i>owed</i> or <i>expected</i>. The rent is <i>due</i> on the fifth. The paper is <i>due</i> tomorrow.</p>

Have, of	<p><i>Have</i> is a main verb or part of a helping verb.</p> <p>I <i>have</i> time to do it now.</p> <p>You should <i>have</i> been here last week.</p> <p>We could <i>have</i> gone to the party.</p> <p>When we say, “You should’ve been here,” or “We could’ve gone,” that sounds like should <i>of</i> or could <i>of</i>. It is never correct to use <i>of</i> as part of a helping verb.</p> <p><i>Of</i> is used only as the first word of a prepositional phrase.</p> <p>This is a picture <i>of</i> my father.</p> <p>Today is the fifth <i>of</i> December.</p>
Hear, here	<p><i>Hear</i> tells you what you do with your ear. You h<u>EAR</u> with your <u>EAR</u>.</p> <p>I can’t <i>hear</i> the music.</p> <p><i>Here</i> identifies a <i>place</i>. <u>HERE</u> tells w<u>HERE</u> something is. If it’s <u>HERE</u>, it’s not over t<u>HERE</u>.</p> <p>I like living <i>here</i>.</p> <p><i>Here</i> is your new coat.</p>
It’s, its	<p><i>It’s</i> has only two possible meanings. It means <i>it is</i> or <i>it has</i>.</p> <p><i>It’s</i> time to go.</p> <p><i>It’s</i> been a long time since I saw you.</p> <p><i>Its</i> is a possessive pronoun. It does not take an apostrophe.</p> <p>The cat drank <i>its</i> milk.</p>
Knew, new	<p><i>Knew</i> is the past tense of <i>know</i> and both words deal with knowledge.</p> <p>I <i>knew</i> the answer to that question.</p> <p>I <i>knew</i> her when she was a child.</p> <p><i>New</i> means unused or not old.</p> <p>She bought a <i>new</i> car, not a used one.</p> <p>Isn’t that a <i>new</i> shirt?</p>
Know, no	<p><i>Know</i> is the present tense of the verb that shows knowledge. (See <i>knew</i>).</p> <p>He doesn’t <i>know</i> how to do that.</p> <p><i>No</i> means refusal or not any.</p> <p><i>No</i>, I don’t plan to see her.</p> <p>I have <i>no</i> way to get to her house.</p>
Loose, lose	<p><i>Loose</i> is the <i>opposite of tight</i>. It also means <i>free</i>.</p> <p>That knot is too <i>loose</i> to hold.</p> <p>My horse was tied, but he got <i>loose</i> last night.</p> <p>We speak of someone being “loose as a goose,” and remembering that phrase can help you remember that the word takes two o’s.</p> <p><i>Lose</i> is the opposite of <i>win</i>. Remember that if you get <u>0</u> points you’ll probably <u>LOse</u> the game.</p> <p>I didn’t think we could <i>lose</i> that game.</p>
Passed, past	<p><i>Passed</i> is always a verb.</p> <p>The car <i>passed</i> me on a curve.</p> <p>We always ran when we <i>passed</i> the graveyard.</p> <p><i>Past</i> is never a verb.</p> <p>Let’s forget about the <i>past</i>.</p> <p>We always ran <i>past</i> the graveyard.</p>

Peace, piece	<p><i>Peace</i> is the opposite of <i>war</i>. We have pe<u>A</u>ce in the <u>A</u>bsence of w<u>A</u>r.</p> <p>During the war, we prayed for <i>peace</i>.</p> <p>A <i>piece</i> is a <i>part</i> of something. We ask for a <u>PI</u>Ece of <u>PI</u>E when it's time for dessert.</p> <p>This puzzle is missing a <i>piece</i>.</p>
Principal, principle	<p>Something that is princip<u>A</u>l is very important. It comes first, just as the letter <u>A</u> comes first in the alphabet.</p> <p>The <i>principal</i> called us to his office.</p> <p>Our <i>principal</i> problem is a lack of money.</p> <p>How much interest you earn depends on how much <i>principal</i> you invest.</p> <p>A princip<u>LE</u> is a ru<u>LE</u>.</p> <p>He lived by one <i>principle</i>: Be honest.</p> <p>I know how to work the problem, but I can't explain the <i>principle</i>.</p>
Quiet, quite, quit	<p><i>Quiet</i> means <i>silent</i>, and both words have two syllables: qu<u>I</u>-<u>E</u>t and sl-<u>I</u><u>E</u>nt.</p> <p>We spent a <i>quiet</i> evening together.</p> <p><i>Quite</i> means <i>completely</i> or <i>very</i>. It has only one syllable; quite rhymes with bl<u>I</u>te.</p> <p>I'm not <i>quite</i> done.</p> <p>It's <i>quite</i> cold outside.</p> <p><i>Quit</i> means to <i>stop</i>.</p> <p>I wasn't finished, but I <i>quit</i> anyway.</p>
Real, really	<p><i>Real</i> means genuine. We got a <i>real</i> deal on this house!</p> <p>Is that a <i>real</i> diamond, or is it a fake?</p> <p><i>Really</i> means <i>very</i>.</p> <p>My grandfather is <i>really</i> old.</p> <p>It was <i>really</i> hot yesterday.</p> <p>Don't use real when you mean really.</p>
Right, write	<p>Something that is <i>right</i> is <i>correct</i>.</p> <p>I don't think that's the <i>right</i> answer.</p> <p><i>Write</i> means to <i>record on paper</i>. You <u>WRIT</u>E with a pen or type <u>WRIT</u>Er.</p> <p>You should <i>write</i> to your mother more often.</p>
Sense, since	<p>Use <i>sense</i> when you talk about sensations such as feeling, tasting, hearing, and so on, or when you talk about intelligence.</p> <p>She has a good <i>sense</i> of smell.</p> <p>I <i>sensed</i> there was something near me.</p> <p>He doesn't have good <i>sense</i>.</p> <p>Use <i>since</i> to talk about t<u>I</u>me or cause.</p> <p>It's been years <i>since</i> I was there.</p> <p><i>Since</i> the party was over, we left.</p>
Than, then	<p>Th<u>A</u>n is a word that comp<u>A</u>res things.</p> <p>My car is much older <i>than</i> theirs.</p> <p>Th<u>E</u>n always tells wh<u>E</u>n.</p> <p>I started my homework; <i>then</i> my brother came by.</p> <p>We'll do the dishes first, and <i>then</i> we'll go the movies.</p>

Their, there, they're	<p><i>Their</i> is always a possessive pronoun. (The <i>y</i> of <i>they</i> becomes <i>i</i> before the possessive <i>r</i> [like <i>her</i>].)</p> <p>They watched <i>their</i> daughter win the race.</p> <p><u>THERE</u> tells <u>WHERE</u> something is, or it points something out.</p> <p>If it's not here or <i>there</i>, I don't know where it is.</p> <p><i>There</i> were six vultures circling overhead.</p> <p><i>They're</i> is always a contraction of <i>they are</i>.</p> <p><i>They're</i> sure to win if they practice.</p>
Threw, through	<p><i>Threw</i> is the past tense of <i>throw</i>. It is always a verb.</p> <p>I <i>threw</i> the rock.</p> <p>Use <i>through</i> for any other meaning.</p> <p>Are you <i>through</i> with your breakfast?</p> <p>Don't walk <i>through</i> that door.</p>
Two, too, to	<p>Two has only one meaning. It is a number. (Think <u>TW</u>ins are always <u>TW</u>o.)</p> <p>There are <i>two</i> lions on the hood of the car.</p> <p><i>Too</i> has two <i>o</i>'s and two meanings. It means <i>also</i>, and it means <i>more than enough</i>.</p> <p>Heather brought mustard, and Sara did, <i>too</i>.</p> <p>That meant we had <i>too</i> much mustard.</p> <p>Both meanings of <i>too</i> show that something is added. Remembering that can remind you to add the extra <u>O</u>.</p> <p>Use <i>to</i> for any meaning other than the three shown here.</p> <p>I'd like <i>to</i> escape from here.</p> <p>I think I'll go <i>to</i> China.</p>
Weather, whether	<p><i>Weather</i> is what happens outdoors. One form of we<u>A</u>ther is r<u>A</u>in.</p> <p>The <i>weather</i> today is terrible.</p> <p><i>Whether</i> refers to a choice. It means I don't know <i>whether</i> to sleep or exercise. (Remember <i>either</i> also presents a choice.)</p> <p><i>Whether</i> you do it is up to you.</p>
Were, where	<p><i>Were</i> is always a verb.</p> <p>They <i>were</i> looking for their dog.</p> <p><i>Where</i> talks about a <i>place</i>. If you ask w<u>H</u>ERE something is, you'll be told it's either <u>H</u>ERE or <u>t</u>HERE.</p> <p><i>Where</i> have all the flowers gone?</p>
Who's, whose	<p><i>Who's</i> is always a contraction of <i>who is</i> or <i>who has</i>.</p> <p><i>Who's</i> been sleeping in my bed?</p> <p><i>Who's</i> been sitting in my chair?</p> <p><i>Whose</i> is a possessive pronoun.</p> <p>I know <i>whose</i> woods these are.</p> <p>She's the one <i>whose</i> sister is a surgeon.</p>
You're, your	<p><i>You're</i> is always a contraction of <i>you are</i>.</p> <p><i>You're</i> the one who broke it.</p> <p><i>Your</i> is a possessive pronoun. (Remember the possessive <i>r</i> on the end of <i>her</i> and <i>their</i>.)</p> <p><i>Your</i> brother is the one who broke it.</p>