



## Writing Guide: **Commonly Confused Words**

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### **a, an**

Use a before words that begin with a consonant sound.

Ex.: a computer, a student's grade, a university, a window

Use an before words that begin with a vowel sound.

Ex.: an apple, an electric guitar, an honor student, an outrage

### **accept, except**

*Accept* means "to receive." Ex.: Please accept our apologies.

*Except* means "excluding." Ex.: Everyone except Horace was at the party.

### **advice, advise**

*Advice* (pronounced with an "s") is a noun meaning "wise or helpful information."

Ex.: The counselor's advice made the student feel much better.

*Advise* (pronounced with a "z") is a verb meaning "to give advice."

Ex.: The counselors advise students every day.

### **affect, effect**

*Affect* is a verb that means "to influence."

Ex.: Your tardiness will affect your grade.

*Effect* is a noun that means "a result."

Ex.: Studying hard will have a positive effect on your grade.

### **conscience, conscious**

*Conscience* is a noun meaning "a person's sense of right and wrong."

Ex.: Skipping class gives some students a guilty conscience.

*Conscious* is an adjective meaning "alert or aware."

Ex.: The victim was in pain but completely conscious.

### **idea, ideal**

*Idea* is a noun meaning "thought or notion."

Ex.: Reviewing grammar and punctuation is a good idea.

*Ideal* can be an adjective meaning "best possible."



Ex.: In an ideal world, people would not have to work.

*Ideal* can be a noun meaning “a perfect example or model.”

Ex.: The techniques of Gandhi are held as the ideal of nonviolent protest.

### **its, it's**

*Its* is a possessive pronoun meaning “belonging to it.”

Ex.: The puppy wagged its tail.

*It's* is a contraction of “it is.”

Ex.: It's going to be a long semester.

### **loose, lose**

*Loose* is an adjective meaning “unfastened or not tight.”

Ex.: The screw on the doorknob is loose.

*Lose* is a verb meaning “to misplace or to be defeated.”

Ex.: Teachers lose pencils and pens every day.

### **their, there, they're**

*Their* is a possessive pronoun meaning “belonging to them.”

Ex.: Their baby girl is beautiful.

*There* is a word that indicates location.

Ex.: The kids are over there.

*There* is also used to begin certain kinds of sentences.

Ex.: There are many good reasons for attending WCC.

*They're* is a contraction of “they are.”

Ex.: They're falling in love.

### **than, then**

*Than* is a conjunction used for comparison.

Ex.: For office parties, pizza is better than spaghetti.

*Then* is an adverb that that means “after” or “at a later time.”

Ex.: I ordered spaghetti; then my boss ordered pizza.



**to, too, two**

*To* is a preposition that indicates destination.

Ex.: I am going to class now.

*Too* is a synonym for “also.”

Ex. She is going to class too.

*Too* can be an intensifier for an adjective.

Ex.: This classroom is too hot.

*Two* is the word for 2.

Ex.: There are two teachers in the Writing Center.

**were, where**

*Were* is the past-tense form of the verb “are.”

Ex. His grandparents were very happy together.

*Where* is a word for location.

Ex.: Where are my navy blue socks?

**your, you're**

*Your* is a possessive pronoun meaning “belonging to you.”

Ex.: She has never met your mother.

*You're* is a contraction of “you are.”

Ex.: You're welcome to take any of these handouts; they're free.