

Commonly Confused Words

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 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.