

Commonly Confused Words

The table below shows commonly misused words:

	Definition	Correct Usage
Accept vs. Except	Accept – to receive or take as payment Except – with the exclusion of	We accept credit cards for purchases except those under five dollars.
Affect vs. Effect	Affect (verb) – to influence or change; the object is the thing that is changed. Affect (noun) – emotion or feeling Effect (noun) – a result Effect (verb) – to cause a change; the object is the change.	The rain did not affect our crop yield. This was not the expected effect . Bill sought to effect changes in environmental policy. Laura claimed indifference, but displayed an excited affect .
Allude vs. Elude	Allude – reference something indirectly. Elude – to escape.	In <i>The Aeneid</i> , Vergil alludes to events in Roman history. In it, Aeneas eludes the Cyclops.
Complement vs. Compliment	Complement – to complete, make perfect Compliment – to give praise	The red sash complements the rest of my outfit. I got many compliments on it today.
Counsel vs. Council	Counsel (verb) – to advise Counsel (noun) – advice Council – an assembly or meeting	The council meets every day. Their job is to counsel the king on matters of the State.
Elicit vs. Illicit	Elicit – to bring out Illicit – not allowed by law	We elicited a confession quickly. He was very open about his illicit behavior.
Emigrate vs. Immigrate	Emigrate – to leave and move to another place Immigrate – to come to a country to live there	Programs are available for skilled workers to emigrate from Asia. Many have thus immigrated to the U.S.
Eminent vs. Imminent	Eminent – standing out, prominent Imminent – about to take place	Dark, eminent clouds filled the sky. A storm was imminent .
Gracious vs. Gratuitous	Gracious – pleasantly kind, courteous Gratuitous – without reason or payment	Molly was a gracious host at the party, even when a guest began yelling gratuitous insults.
Infirmity vs. Infirmary	Infirmity – a place for care of the sick Infirmary – disability or weakness	The infirmities she was suffering from only increased as she aged in the infirmary .
Lose vs. Loose	Lose – become unable to find, misplace Loose – free, not bound together	I will lose my keys if they are tied on with a loose knot.
Precede vs. Proceed	Precede – to come before Proceed – to move forward	A loud noise preceded the fireworks. The officers told us to proceed with caution.
Principle vs. Principal	Principle – a rule or fact Principal (noun) – chief official	Always use the principle : “Ask before taking.” This is the principal way we keep track of items.

	Principal (adjective) – most important	
Reluctant vs. Reticent	Reluctant – feeling hesitation Reticent – reserved, silent	A reticent person, Jonah was reluctant to speak in public.
Respectful vs. Respective	Respectful – showing respect or admiration for Respective – relating separately	The guests were respectful of the rules she had set. They stayed at their respective tables.
Than vs. Then	Than – a conjunction used to compare Then – next or soon after	I told her I liked peas more than candy. Then she really thought I was lying!
Too vs. To	Too – in addition, also, or excessively To – a preposition used to show direction toward a point	Please drive to the market this afternoon. Make sure you bring the coupons, too : you don't want to spend too much.
Weather vs. Whether	Weather – temperature and conditions Whether – which of the two	I can't decide whether to go to the park or the gym. I suppose it depends on the weather .

There are also some words that are commonly confused but have specific grammatical rules that you can try to remember:

	Rule	Correct Usage
Among vs. Between	Use between only for relationships of two. Use among for relationships of more than two.	It was hard to choose between the red and pink scarves. Among the four gloves, the white ones were best.
Less vs. Fewer	Use fewer for people or things you can count. Use less for things that can't be counted or don't have a plural.	Fewer people are opening their own businesses these days. Unfortunately, this means less money is being spent locally.
Its vs. It's	Its is the possessive form of "it." It's means "it is."	It's hard to tell when the baby will start crying. Its arched brows make it always appear upset!
Their vs. They're	Their is the possessive form of "they." They're means "they are."	The team practiced all year, and their hard work paid off. They're going to the championship.
Whose vs. Who's	Whose is the possessive form of "who." Who's means "who is."	Who's going to the store with me? Judy is. Now whose car should we take?
Your vs. You're	Your is the possessive form of "you." You're means "you are."	You're too talented to give up acting. Plus, your voice is incredible!
Who vs. Whom vs. Which	Who and whom both refer to people; who is used as subject pronoun, and whom is used as an object pronoun. Which refers to things or groups.	Who brought the salad? To whom should I return the bowl? The bowl, which has a beautiful pattern on the inside, looks like it might be expensive.