

Easily confused words

Computer spell-checkers will *not* help you tell these words apart—you just have to learn them! To this list, add any other words you often confuse or misspell.

Accept and except

Accept is a verb and means *to receive, agree, or believe*:
*I generally **accept** the truth.*

Except is a preposition which means *but not or other than*:
*He is a great guy **except** for his temper.*

Affect and effect

Affect is a verb meaning *to influence or act on*:
*How did the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi **affect** you?*

Effect is usually a noun meaning *result*:
*The acupuncture had a positive **effect** on my headaches.*

(Note: a less-common use of *effect* is as a verb meaning *bring about*:
*Widespread criticism finally **effected** a change in procedures.*)

All right and “alright”

All right is the only correct choice. *Alright* is not a word (maybe you’re thinking of *already*?):

*It turned out **all right** in the end.*
***All right**, we’ll go with you.*

Are and our

Are is a verb, a plural form of *be*:
*They **are** expecting a quiz on Thursday.*

Our means *belonging to us*:
***Our** winter break starts in mid-December.*

Break and brake

Break means *to separate into parts, especially by force*:
*I hope you didn’t **break** my phone when you dropped it.*

Brake means *to slow or stop*:
*If you **brake** slowly, you have more control over your car.*

Cite, site, and sight

Cite is a verb that means *tell where you learned something*:
*My instructor told me to **cite** my sources.*

Site is a noun that means *place or location*, including online locations:
*The construction **site** is marked with a sign.*
*That **website** (or **site**) will be a good resource for your paper.*

Sight is the ability to see:
*You can protect your **sight** by wearing sunglasses.*

Its and it’s

Its is a pronoun showing possession:
*The door had **its** lock replaced.*

It’s is a contraction that means *it is*:
***It’s** too bad she didn’t get the job.*

Principal and principle

Principal is an adjective meaning *primary* or a noun meaning *chief administrator*:

*Japan’s **principal** export is electronics.*
*The **principal** spoke to the assembly about drinking and driving.*

Principle is a noun. It means *a rule, idea, or general law*:
*The unions fought for the **principle** of collective bargaining.*

Than and then

Than means *when compared to*:
*Your purse is heavier **than** my backpack.*

Then means *next, at that time or in that case*:
*We had dinner; **then** we went to the movies.*
*If the car isn’t running, **then** we should take the bus.*

There, their, and they're

There is an adverb meaning *in* or *at that place*:

The cookie is *there* on the plate.

Their means *belonging to them*:

The students presented *their* views on the issue.

They're is a contraction of *they are*:

They're a great inspiration for the rest of us.

Though and thought

Though is an adverb meaning *even if*.

Though I applied to UC Santa Cruz, I decided to go to Sac State.

Thought is a noun meaning *an idea, belief, or intention*. It is also the past-tense form of the verb *think*:

My *thought* is that we should wait for them here.

I *thought* you were finished.

Through and threw

Threw is the past tense of *throw*—to *make something fly quickly through the air using your arm*:

He *threw* the Frisbee downfield.

Through shows *movement from one end of something to another*. It also means *because of*:

We searched *through* the database but never found the book.

I'm graduating early *through* the support of my family.

To, too, and two

To shows *location, direction, and other relationships in a prepositional phrase*; with a verb it marks an infinitive:

We'll be going *to* the movies tomorrow. We want *to* go early.

Too means *also* or *in excess*:

I would go, *too*, but it costs *too* much money.

Two means 2:

She lives only *two* miles from campus.

Weather and whether

Weather is a noun; it is the *conditions of the atmosphere* such as temperature, clouds, wind, or rain:

The *weather* is expected to be warm on Saturday.

Whether means *if* and indicates choices, alternatives, or possibilities:

I don't know yet *whether* I got in the class.

Where and were

Where is an adverb meaning *in what place*:

He didn't say *where* he put the keys.

Were is a plural past tense of *is*:

They *were* afraid to stay any later than ten o'clock.

Which, witch, and sandwich

Which means *what particular one out a group*. It also replaces the name of something previously mentioned:

Which sunglasses do you think look better on me?

I bought the black sunglasses, *which* looked better.

Witch refers to *a woman with magic powers, or an adherent of Wicca, or an unpleasant woman*:

She says she is a *witch* in the Wiccan church.

My neighbor can act like a real *witch* when my dog goes in her yard.

Sandwich, on the other hand, is just w-i-c-h!

Who's and whose

Who's is a contraction of *who is*:

Who's there?

Whose means *belonging to someone or belonging to something*. It is a possessive form of *who* or *which*:

I work at the desk *whose* inbox is full.

You're and your

You're is a contraction of *you are*:

You're supposed to keep your promises.

Your means *belonging to you*:

That is *your* decision.

