

## Easily Confused Words

When you revise, make sure you've used the right word, not its homophone, or some close, but distorted version of the word. Spell checker and grammar checker won't catch many of these usage errors, especially when you correctly spell the wrong word. And if you misspell a word, spell check will offer you a substitute, but you should use a dictionary to **confirm that the substitute is the right word**, not just a correctly-spelled word that resembles the word you're looking for. If you have any doubts about the word, consult a **dictionary**, which will help you to distinguish between easily confused words.

Some of the more common easily confused words

affect/effect	less/fewer	there/their/they're
principal/principle	its/it's	then/than
accept/except	loose/lose	your/you're
throughout/threw out	who/which	who/whom
definitely/defiantly	between/among	

### Notes about Easily Confused Words

1. Use a **dictionary**. Don't rely on spell checker or grammar checker.

2. **Who and Whom.** Who=a subject pronoun, so treat it like a he/they. Whom=an object pronoun, so treat it like him/them. Substitute *he* for *who* and *him* for *whom* and place the substitute next to the verb and you'll be able to see which is correct. An easy way to find the correct answer is to turn the who/whom clause into a question as in the examples below.

**Example:** He is the one (who/whom) I love? I love *him* or I love *he*? Clearly, *him* is correct because I is the subject and him is the object of the verb love.

**Example:** (Who/whom) wrote the novel? Find the verb (*wrote*) and place he/him next to it. *Him* wrote the novel or *he* wrote the novel? *He wrote the novel* is correct, so use *who*, not *whom*.

3. **Less and fewer?** Most grocery stores get this one wrong. Less refers to quantity and fewer refers to number. If you're asking how many, it's fewer. If you're asking how much, it's less.

**Example:** I have fewer than ten friends or less than 10 friends? Are you asking how much friends or how many? *How many*, so the answer is *fewer than ten friends*

4. For most **easily confused words with apostrophes**, remember that they are likely contractions, so say the two words out in their entirety. Don't say *it's*; say *it is*. Don't say *who's*; say *who is*.
5. **Who, which, that**. If you're referring to people, use **who**, not **which or that**, which refer to non-humans or groups.
6. With **then and than**, recall that then is for sequencing. *Then* and *time* both have the letter e. *Than* is for comparison. Both *than* and *comparison* have the letter a.
7. **There** has the word *here* in it, so it's a place word; it also appears before the verb to be (there is/there are). **They're** is a contraction of *they are*. **Their** has the word *heir* in it, as in Paris Hilton is heir or heiress to her family's fortune. *Their* is a word that indicates possession.
8. There are no such phrases such as ~~would of~~, ~~might of~~, or ~~could of~~. It's *would've* (contraction of *would + have*), *might've* (contraction of *might + have*), and *could've* (contraction of *could + have*).
9. **Affect** means influence; **effect** means result.
10. **Between and among**. Use *between* for two entities and *among* for more than two entities.

Example: A wall exists between the two of us. Among the three of us, Smedley is the most intelligent.

**Directions:** Circle the appropriate word in each sentence.

1. She (should of/ should've) referred to a dictionary to avoid confusion.
2. I (might've/might of) been the one who forgot to flush the toilet.
3. Is (you're/your) house on Main Street or Maine Street?
4. I hope (your/you're) right about her.
5. I answered all of the questions (accept/except) the last one.
6. Will you (accept/except) the flowers, or am I going to have to buy you a more expensive make-up gift?
7. First I studied; (then/than) I partied.
8. He is a better person (then/than) I am.

9. Yesterday, one of my friends, Henry Hunderfunde, (who/whom) came from Germany, told me about his Nazi grandparents.
10. I want to know (who/whom) you've been texting and calling at three in the morning!
11. He is on a team (who/that) tends to win the championship every year.
12. She is the person (who/that) found my lost wallet.
13. I can't believe that you (throughout/threw out) the tickets to the Broadway show. They cost me \$250. Damn!
14. (Throughout/Threw out) my life, I've been puzzled by the distinction between less and fewer.
15. If I had eaten (less/fewer) dinner, I would have (less/fewer) calories to burn.
16. There are more PhDs on our faculty, but (less/fewer) good teachers.
17. (Their/They're/There) is going to be a party at (their/they're/there) house tonight.
18. I hope that (their/they're/there) not upset about my failure to be (their/they're/there) on time.
19. I hope you don't (loose/lose) your mind.
20. Your laces are (loose/lose). Tie them so that you don't trip.
21. Are you a person of (principal/principle)?
22. The (principal/principle) reason we chose you as (principal/principle) of the school is that you have (principals/principles).
23. (It's/Its) a rash that is likely the result of a tick bite or bed bugs.
24. I hope that (it's/its) paws haven't been injured by that broken glass.
25. He is (defiantly/definitely) not allowed to hang out with us.
26. She has been (definitely/defiantly) refusing to follow the company policies.

27. What values have been transmitted (between/among) those two generations of Americans?
28. David, (between/among) the greatest of all students, studied late into the night in order to earn good grades.
29. How were you (affected/effect) by the storm?
30. What will be the (affect/effect) if you don't do as you're told?
31. He doesn't know (whose/who's) money that is.
32. (Who's/Whose) that man over there?