

COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS

1. Affect/Effect

Affect: to influence (verb): “The garden’s yield was **affected** by the lack of water.”

Effect: to make or accomplish (verb); result (noun): “The new reward system **effected** great changes in the workers’ morale.” “One **effect** of the drought was a poor tomato crop.”

2. Discreet/Discrete

Discreet: tactful or prudent (adjective): “Cheryl was **discreet** about giving her advice to Naomi.”

Discrete: distinct or separate (adjective): “The voters were divided into six **discrete** factions.”

3. Its/It’s

Its: Possessive pronoun: “**Its** condition was bad.”

It’s: Contraction for “it is”: “**It’s** cold out tonight.”

4. Loose/Lose

Loose: not tight (adjective or adverb): “The **loose** knot caused the net to give way”. “The knot worked **loose**, and the rowboat drifted away from the dock.”

Lose: to misplace, or the opposite of “to win” (verb); “I predict the Panthers will **lose** tonight.”

5. Precede/Proceed

Precede: to come before (verb): “K **precedes** L in the alphabet.”

Proceed: to go forward (verb): “The diplomatic party **proceeded** into the restaurant.”

6. Principal/Principle

Principal: The main one; most important (adjective); the head of an organization, or a sum of money (noun): “A **principal** witness in the case has been granted immunity.”

Principle: an ideal or a belief; a basic standard of law (noun): “The United States was founded on the **principle** of freedom.”

7. Their/They’re/There

Their: possessive pronoun, belonging to “them.”

There: an adverb of place; “Where is it?” “There.”

They’re: a contraction for “they are.”

“**Their** doughnuts were purchased **there** at Krispy Kreme. **They’re** still very fresh.”

8. Your/You’re

Your: possessive pronoun: “It is **your** fault.”

You’re: contraction for “you are”: “**You’re** the person selected to chair the committee.”

9. Accept/Except

Accept: to take willingly; to receive (verb): “I **accept** the position with pleasure.”

Except: preposition of exclusion: “Everyone is going **except** Ted.”

10. Advice/Advise

Advice: consultation or information given or taken (noun): “Sometimes **advice** isn’t wanted, even if it is needed.”

Advise: to give someone suggestions (verb): “Jim **advised** John not to cosign on the loan.”

11. To/Too

Too: an intensifier (adverb): “It was **too** cold to go swimming.”

To: a preposition: “I will go **to** the evening meeting.”

12. Weather/Whether

Weather: this noun refers to atmospheric conditions: rain, snow, wind, and so on: “Montana residents experience a wide variety of **weather**.”

Whether: This conjunction refers to a choice between alternatives: “I have to decide **whether** or not to take Algebra II.”

13. Fewer/Less

Fewer: refers to items that can be counted: “**Fewer** people showed up at the play tonight than were expected.”

Less: refers to general amounts: “**Less** snow fell than was predicted.” (Snow can’t be measured by counting.)

14. Cause/Because

Cause: a reason, motive, principle; a thing responsible for a condition or a result (noun): “The earthquake was the **cause** of the deadly tsunami.”

Because: a conjunction indicating a cause and effect relationship: “I gained weight **because** I couldn’t exercise for three months.”

15. All ready/Already

All ready: this phrase means “completely prepared”: “We were **all ready** for the hurricane.”

Already: this word means in the past (adverb): “I have **already** taken that class.”

16. Desert/Dessert

Desert: An area of land characterized by dry, sandy conditions (noun); or the verb “to abandon”: “The Sahara **Desert** makes up much of Northern Africa.” “The hitch hiker was **deserted** at the rest stop.”

Dessert: the last course of the meal, usually a sweet treat (noun): “For **dessert**, we had chocolate cream pie.”

17. Lay/Lie

Lay: a verb meaning “to set down.” Its principal parts are lay, laid, laid: “The workers **laid** carpet for a living.”

Lie: a verb meaning “to recline.” Its principal parts are lie, lay, lain: “Sheila **lies** down after every meal.”

18. Quiet/Quite

Quiet: This word means “without noise” (adjective): “The nursery was very **quiet**.”

Quite: this adverb is a qualifier: “I was **quite** happy without any television.”

19. Whose/Who’s

Whose: a possessive pronoun: “**Whose** boots are those?”

Who’s: a contraction for “who is”: “**Who’s** going to *The Incredibles*?”

20. Than/Then

Than: a word used in making comparisons: “My sister is younger **than** my brother but older **than** I am.”

Then: an adverb referring to time, or “next”: “I walked a mile; **then** I swam forty laps.”