

## What words confuse some writers?

Words with similar sounds can have very different meanings.

Here's a list of words that are frequently confused. Master them, and you'll be well on the way to using the right word.

1. **accede/exceed**

accede: to yield

exceed: to go beyond, surpass

I **accede** to your demand that we not **exceed** the budget.

2. **accept/except**

accept: to receive

except: to leave out or exclude; but

I **accept** your proposal **except** for point 3.

3. **access/excess**

access: the right to use; admission to

excess: surplus

As a supply clerk, he had **access** to any **excess** materials.

4. **adept/adopt**

adept: skilled

adopt: to take as one's own

She was **adept** at getting people to **adopt** her ideas.

5. **advice/advise**

advice: (noun) counsel

advise: (verb) to give counsel or advice to someone

I asked him to **advise** me but I didn't like the **advice** I got.

6. **affect/effect**

affect: (verb) to influence or modify

effect: (verb) to produce or cause; (noun) result

He hoped that his argument would **affect** his boss' decision, but so far as he could see, it had not.

The tax relief **effected** some improvement for the citizens whose incomes had been **affected** by inflation.

7. **affluent/effluent**

affluent: (adjective) rich, possessing in abundance

effluent: (noun) something that flows out

**Affluent** companies can afford the cost of removing pollutants from the **effluents** their factories produce.

8. **a lot/allot**

a lot: many (informal)

allot: divide or give to

**A lot** of players signed up for this year's draft. We **allotted** one first-round draft choice to each team.

**9. amount/number**

amount: (use with concepts that cannot be counted individually but can only be measured)

number: (use when items can be counted individually)

It's a mistake to try to gauge the **amount** of interest he has by the **number** of questions he asks.

**10. are/our**

are: (plural linking verb)

our: belonging to us

**Are** we ready to go ahead with **our** proposal?

**11. attributed/contributed**

attributed: was said to be caused by

contributed: gave something to

The rain probably **contributed** to the accident, but the police officer **attributed** the accident to driver error.

**12. between/among**

between: (use with only two choices)

among: (use with more than two choices)

This year the differences **between** the two candidates for president are unusually clear.

I don't see any major differences **among** the candidates for city council.

**13. cite/sight/site**

cite: (verb) to quote

sight: (noun) vision, something to be seen

site: (noun) location, place where a building is or will be built

She **cited** the old story of the building inspector who was depressed by the very **sight** of the **site** for the new factory.

**14. complement/compliment**

complement: (verb) to complete, finish; (noun) something that completes

compliment: (verb) to praise; (noun) praise

The **compliment** she gave me **complemented** my happiness.

**15. compose/comprise**

compose: makeup, create

comprise: consist of, be made up of, be composed of

The city council is **composed** of 12 members. Each district **comprises** an area 50 blocks square.

**16. confuse/complicate/exacerbate**

confuse: to bewilder

complicate: to make more complex or detailed

exacerbate: to make worse

Because I missed the first 20 minutes of the movie, I didn't understand what was going on. The **complicated** plot **exacerbated** my **confusion**.

**17. dependant/dependent**

dependant: (noun) someone for whom one is financially responsible

dependent: (adjective) relying on someone else

Revenue Canada regulations don't let us count our 25-year-old son as a **dependant** but he is still financially **dependent** on us.

18. **describe/prescribe**

describe: list the features of something, tell what something looks like

prescribe: specify the features something must contain

The law **prescribes** the priorities for making repairs. His report **describes** our plans to comply with the law.

19. **discreet/discrete**

discreet: tactful, careful not to reveal secrets

discrete: separate, distinct

I have known him to be **discreet** on two **discrete** occasions.

20. **do/du**

do: (verb) act or make

due: (adjective) scheduled, caused by

The banker said she would **do** her best to change the **due** date.

**Due** to the computer system, the payroll can be produced in only two days for all 453 employees.

21. **elicit/illicit**

elicit: (verb) to draw out

illicit: (adjective) not permitted, unlawful

The reporter could **elicit** no information from the Senator about his **illicit** love affair.

22. **eminent/immanent/imminent**

eminent: distinguished

immanent: dwelling within tangible objects

imminent: about to happen

The **eminent** doctor believed that death was **imminent**. The **eminent** minister believed that God was **immanent**.

23. **fewer/less**

fewer: (use for objects that can be counted individually)

less: (use for objects that can be measured but not counted individually)

There is **less** sand in this bucket; there are probably **fewer** grains of sand, too.

24. **forward/foreword**

forward: ahead

foreword: preface, introduction

The author looked **forward** to writing the **foreword** to the book.

25. **good/well**

good: (adjective, used to modify nouns; as a noun, means something that is good).

well: (adverb, used to modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs)

Her words "**Good** work!" told him that he was doing **well**.

He spent a great deal of time doing volunteer work because he believed that doing **good** was just as important as doing **well**.

26. **i.e./e.g.**

i.e.: (*id est*—that is) introduces a restatement or explanation of the preceding word or phrase

e.g.: (*exempli gratia*—for the sake of an example; for example) introduces one or more examples

Although he had never studied Latin, he rarely made a mistake in using Latin abbreviations, *e.g.*, *i.e.*, *etc.*, because he associated each with a mnemonic device (*i.e.*, a word or image used to help one remember something). He remembered *i.e.* as in effect, pretended that *e.g.* meant example given, and used *etc.* only when *examples to continue* would fit. |

27. **imply/infer**

imply: suggest, put an idea into someone's head

infer: deduce, get an idea out from something

She **implied** that an announcement would be made soon. I **inferred** from her smile that it would be an announcement of her promotion.

28. **it's/its**

it's: it is, it has

its: belonging to it

**It's** clear that a company must satisfy **its** customers to stay in business.

29. **lectern/podium**

lectern: raised stand with a slanted top that holds a manuscript for a reader or notes for a speaker

podium: platform for a speaker or conductor to stand on

I left my notes on the **lectern** when I left the **podium** at the end of my talk.

30. **lie/lay**

lie: to recline; to tell a falsehood (never takes an object)

lay: to put an object on something (always takes an object)

He was **laying** papers on the desk when I came in, but they aren't **lying** there now.

31. **loose/lose**

loose: not tight

lose: to have something disappear

If I **lose** weight, this suit will be **loose**.

32. **moral/morale**

moral: (adjective virtuous, good; (noun: morals) ethics, sense of right and wrong

morale: (noun) spirit, attitude, mental outlook

Studies have shown that coed dormitories improve student **morale** without harming student **morals**.

33. **objective/rationale**

objective: goal

rationale: reason, justification

The **objective** of the meeting was to explain the **rationale** behind the decision.

34. **personal/personnel**

personal: to be used by one person

personnel: staff, employees

All **personnel** will get new **personal** computers by the end of the year.

35. **possible/possibly**

possible: (adjective) something that can be done

possibly: (adverb) perhaps

It is **possible** that we will be able to hire this spring. We can choose from **possibly** the best graduating class in the past five years.

36. **precede/proceed**

precede: (verb) to go before

proceed: (verb) to continue; (noun: proceeds) money

Raising the money must **precede** spending it. Only after we obtain funds can we **proceed** to spend the **proceeds**.

37. **principal/principle**

principal: (adjective) main; (noun) person in charge; money lent out at interest

principle: (noun) basic truth or rule, code of conduct

*The Prince*, Machiavelli's **principal** work, describes his **principles** for ruling a state.

38. **quiet/quite**

quiet: not noisy

quite: very

It was **quite** difficult to find a **quiet** spot anywhere near the floor of the stock exchange.

39. **regulate/relegate**

regulate: control

relegate: put (usually in an inferior position)

If the federal government **regulates** the size of lettering on county road signs, we may as well **relegate** the current signs to the garbage bin.

40. **residence/residents**

residence: home

residents: people who live in a building

The **residents** had different reactions when they learned that a shopping mall would be built next to their **residence**.

41. **respectfully/respectively**

respectfully: with respect

respectively: to each in the order listed

When I was introduced to the Queen, the Prime Minister, and the court jester, I bowed **respectfully**, shook hands politely, and winked, **respectively**.

42. **role/roll**

role: part in a play or script, function (in a group)

roll: (noun) list of students, voters, or other members; round piece of bread; (verb) move by turning over and over

While the teacher called the **roll** George—in his **role** as class clown—threw a **roll** he had saved from lunch.

43. **simple/simplistic**

simple: not complicated

simplistic: watered down, oversimplified

She was able to explain the proposal in **simple** terms without making the explanation sound **simplistic**.

44. **stationary/stationery**

stationary: not moving, fixed

stationery: paper

During the earthquake, even the **stationery** was not **stationary**.

45. **their/there/they're**

their: belonging to them

there: in that place

they're: they are

**There** are plans, designed to **their** specifications, for the house **they're** building.

46. **to/too/two**

to: (preposition) function word indicating proximity, purpose, time, etc.

too: (adverb) also, very, excessively

two: (adjective) the number 2

The formula is **too** secret to entrust **to two** people.

47. **unique/unusual**

unique: sole, only, alone

unusual: not common

I believed that I was **unique** in my ability to memorize long strings of numbers until I consulted the *Guinness Book of World Records* and found that I was merely **unusual**: Someone else had equaled my feat in 1997.

48. **verbal/oral**

verbal: using words

oral: spoken, not written

His **verbal** skills were uneven: His **oral** communication was excellent but he didn't write well. His sensitivity to **non-verbal** cues was acute. He could tell what kind of day I had just by looking at my face.

**Hint:** Oral comes from the Latin word for mouth, *os*. Think of Oral-B

Toothbrushes: For the mouth. Verbal comes from the Latin word for word, *verba*. Nonverbal language is language that does not use words (e.g., body language, gestures).

49. **whether/weather**

whether: (conjunction) used to introduce possible alternatives

weather: (noun) state of the atmosphere: wet or dry, hot or cold, calm or storm

We will have to see what the **weather** is before we decide **whether** to hold the picnic indoors or out.

50. **your/you're**

your: belonging to you

you're: you are

**You're** the top candidate for promotion in **your** division.