

University of Houston Clear Lake

WRITING CENTER

Commonly Confused Words

Accept / except

Accept is a verb meaning “to receive or come to terms with”: “She *accepted* his story as truth.”

Except is a preposition meaning “excluding”: “I like every kind of ice cream *except* strawberry.”

A lot / allot

A lot is an informal way of saying “a bunch” or “several.” It is **never** combined as “*alot*” is not a word.

Allot is a verb meaning “to divide up and distribute”: “The father *allotted* one piece of the pie to each child.”

Effect / affect

Effect is almost always a noun meaning “a result” or “a consequence”: “The drug Lucy took had multiple side *effects*.”

Affect is a verb meaning “to change, alter, or have impact on”: “His harsh words really *affected* me.”

Exception: *effect* can be used as a verb meaning “to bring about”: “The president’s new policies *effected* a big change in the economy” (most often used in “*to effect a change*”).

Every day / everyday

Every day, typed as two words, means the same as *each* day or *every single* day.

Everyday is an adjective that means “common,” “typical,” or “routine”: “The doctor said I could resume my *everyday* activities” or “Falling asleep at her desk is an *everyday* occurrence for her.”

Good / well

Good is an adjective used to describe a noun: “a *good* dinner” or “a *good* performance,” etc.

Well is an adverb used to describe a verb: “she cooks *well*” or “the choir sings *well*.” **Well** can also modify an adjective: “a well-known cook” or “well-informed journalist.” (Note the hyphen usage.)

Reminder: Superman is doing good by saving people. You are always doing well.

It's / its

It's includes an apostrophe ('), which means the word is a contraction of two words: *it* and *is*. If you use this word, you must be able to logically replace it with “it is.” Otherwise, it's incorrect.

Its (without an apostrophe) is a possessive pronoun which shows that something belongs to “it”: “The dog found *its* bone” or “The corporation failed to fully report *its* losses.”

Loose / lose

Loose (with the double o) is an adjective meaning a variety of things: relaxed, not tight, or not secure: “She preferred to wear *loose*-fitting pants” or “The *loose* screw made the ladder dangerous.”

Lose is a verb meaning to misplace, shed, or not win. You can *lose* keys, *lose* weight, or *lose* a game.

Then / than

Then is an adverb referring to time or sequence, such as “next” or “afterward.”

Than is a conjunction implying a comparison: “He is a stronger swimmer *than* she is.”

They're / their / there

They're includes an apostrophe, indicating that the word is a contraction of *they* and *are*. You must be able to replace *they're* with *they are* in your sentence. Any other use is incorrect.

Their is a possessive pronoun. Use this word to show that something belongs to two or more people: “Their son failed first grade” or “The women fought for their right to vote.”

There is an adverb denoting a place: “Put the book over *there*.” It can also denote an expletive, an “empty” word used to begin a sentence when the subject follows the verb: “*There* is too much poverty in our world.”

Too / to / two

Too is an intensifier used to show the extent or extremity of some adjective or adverb: “She’s *too* skinny to be healthy” or “He exercised *too* soon after eating dinner.”

To is a preposition for location or direction: “Go *to* New York” or “Give it *to* the teacher.”

Two is a number following *one* and preceding *three*.

Weather / whether

Weather refers to the climate, temperature, outdoor conditions: “The weather is so nice today!”

Whether is a conjunction referring to the choice between two or more alternatives: “I have to decide whether or not I want to attend the party.”

Who / whom

Who is a relative pronoun that acts as a subject, which means it usually appears just before a verb: “The prize went to the contestant who ran the fastest” or “Do you know who called this morning?” S V S V

Whom is a relative pronoun that functions as an object of a verb or preposition: “This is the woman whom he photographed” or “I don’t know whom to contact” or “To whom would you like to speak?” O S V O V P O

In each example, *whom* functions as an object (“receiver”) of something, not the subject (“doer”): he photographed *whom*, to contact *whom*, to speak to *whom*.

You’re / your

You’re includes an apostrophe, indicating that the word is a contraction of *you* and *are*. You must be able to replace *you’re* with *you are* in your sentence. Any other use is incorrect.

Your is a possessive pronoun showing that something belongs to a person: “You haven’t finished *your* dinner” or “Record *your* name in the space provided.”