

# Words Most Often Confused

QUICK HELP

BASIC

EXPANDED

PROFESSIONAL

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**T**he words here perplex nearly everyone from time to time. This list will help you keep them straight and use them correctly.

|                   |                                            |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <i>accept</i>     | to receive willingly                       |
| <i>except</i>     | to exclude                                 |
| <i>advice</i>     | suggestion or counsel                      |
| <i>advise</i>     | a verb meaning "to give advice"            |
| <i>affect</i>     | a verb meaning "to influence"              |
| <i>effect</i>     | a noun meaning "result"                    |
| <i>aggravate</i>  | to make worse                              |
| <i>irritate</i>   | to annoy                                   |
| <i>all ready</i>  | prepared                                   |
| <i>already</i>    | previously                                 |
| <i>anxious</i>    | to anticipate with uneasiness              |
| <i>eager</i>      | to anticipate with enthusiasm              |
| <i>appraise</i>   | to place a value on something              |
| <i>apprise</i>    | to inform                                  |
| <i>awhile</i>     | for a short time ("She waited awhile")     |
| <i>a while</i>    | for a short time (She waited for a while") |
| <i>biweekly</i>   | every two weeks                            |
| <i>semiweekly</i> | twice a week                               |
| <i>bring</i>      | action toward you ("Bring it to me")       |
| <i>take</i>       | action away from you ("Take it to him")    |
| <i>can</i>        | ability                                    |
| <i>may</i>        | possibility or permission                  |
| <i>capital</i>    | a seat of government (a city)              |
| <i>capitol</i>    | a building where a legislature meets       |



|                   |                                                        |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>choose</i>     | to pick (in the present)                               |
| <i>chose</i>      | picked (in the past)                                   |
| <i>climactic</i>  | refers to the high point, or culmination               |
| <i>climatic</i>   | refers to the weather                                  |
| <i>cite</i>       | to quote                                               |
| <i>site</i>       | location                                               |
| <i>compliment</i> | praise                                                 |
| <i>complement</i> | something that completes, or makes perfect             |
| <i>comprise</i>   | to include; the whole comprises the parts              |
| <i>compose</i>    | to be made of; the parts compose the whole             |
| <i>conscience</i> | sense of morality                                      |
| <i>conscious</i>  | aware                                                  |
| <i>convince</i>   | create or change a belief (use with “of”)              |
| <i>persuade</i>   | motivate to take an action (use with “to”)             |
| <i>desert</i>     | a dry, sandy area                                      |
| <i>dessert</i>    | a sweet dish at the end of a meal                      |
| <i>discreet</i>   | circumspect, judicious                                 |
| <i>discrete</i>   | separate, individual                                   |
| <i>e.g.</i>       | “for example”                                          |
| <i>i.e.</i>       | “that is”                                              |
| <i>ensure</i>     | to make certain                                        |
| <i>insure</i>     | to obtain insurance; to guarantee protection or safety |
| <i>everyday</i>   | one word when used as an adjective                     |
| <i>every day</i>  | each day                                               |
| <i>farther</i>    | at a greater distance                                  |
| <i>further</i>    | in addition to                                         |
| <i>faze</i>       | to disturb or disconcert                               |
| <i>phase</i>      | a period or cycle                                      |
| <i>flair</i>      | a special talent                                       |

|                    |                                                         |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>flare</i>       | a sudden bright light, or an outward spread             |
| <i>flaunt</i>      | to show something off                                   |
| <i>flout</i>       | to ignore or disdain                                    |
| <i>flier</i>       | one who flies                                           |
| <i>flyer</i>       | an advertising circular                                 |
| <i>home (in)</i>   | zero in on a target                                     |
| <i>hone</i>        | sharpen                                                 |
| <i>imply</i>       | to hint or suggest (“He implied it to me”)              |
| <i>infer</i>       | to deduce (“I inferred his meaning”)                    |
| <i>its</i>         | belonging to it                                         |
| <i>it’s</i>        | contraction of “it is”                                  |
| <i>later</i>       | afterward                                               |
| <i>latter</i>      | the second of two things                                |
| <i>lay</i>         | to place or set down                                    |
| <i>lie</i>         | to recline                                              |
| <i>less</i>        | for things you can’t count individually (“less money”)  |
| <i>fewer</i>       | for things you can count individually (“fewer dollars”) |
| <i>lets</i>        | allows                                                  |
| <i>let’s</i>       | contraction of “let us”                                 |
| <i>loose</i>       | not tight                                               |
| <i>lose</i>        | opposite of <i>win</i> or <i>find</i>                   |
| <i>nauseous</i>    | causing nausea (“a nauseous smell”)                     |
| <i>nauseated</i>   | feel sick to one’s stomach (“I’m nauseated”)            |
| <i>passed</i>      | a verb; past tense of “pass”                            |
| <i>past</i>        | a noun; the time before now                             |
| <i>predominant</i> | an adjective meaning “prevailing”                       |
| <i>predominate</i> | a verb meaning “to exert control over”                  |
| <i>principal</i>   | main                                                    |
| <i>principle</i>   | rule                                                    |

|                   |                                        |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <i>stanch</i>     | stop the flow                          |
| <i>staunch</i>    | faithful                               |
| <i>stationary</i> | not moving                             |
| <i>stationery</i> | paper                                  |
| <i>tack</i>       | a direction or approach (“a new tack”) |
| <i>tact</i>       | consideration for others’ feelings     |
| <i>than</i>       | compares                               |
| <i>then</i>       | subsequent action                      |
| <i>their</i>      | possessive of “they”                   |
| <i>there</i>      | in that place                          |
| <i>they’re</i>    | contraction of “they are”              |
| <i>to</i>         | toward                                 |
| <i>too</i>        | also                                   |
| <i>whose</i>      | shows ownership                        |
| <i>who’s</i>      | contraction of “who is” or “who has”   |
| <i>your</i>       | belonging to you                       |
| <i>you’re</i>     | a contraction of “you are”             |

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If you liked *Words Most Often Confused*, you might also be interested in *Words Most Often Misspelled*, *15 Tips for Effective Writing*, *Banishing Business Jargon*, and *Writing for the World—A Guide to Globalization*. And for more help in the world of words, see our entire set of easy-to-use [Job Aids for Effective Communication](#) that give you quick, clear guidance as you prepare anything from a memo to a manual to a web page.

