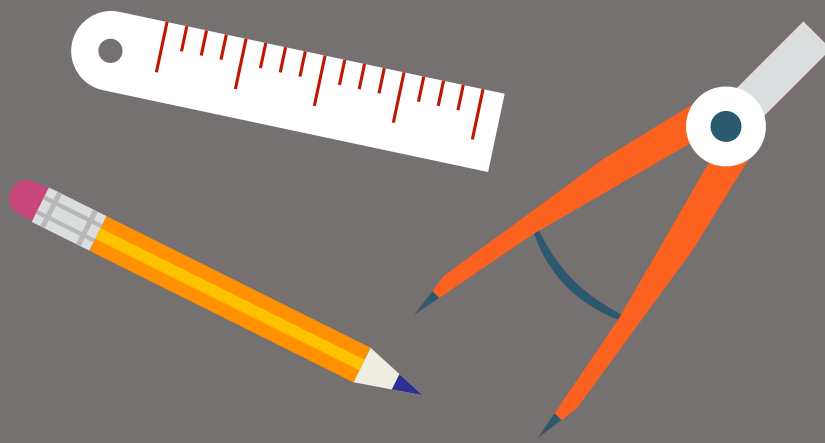


Know the Language: 121 Confused and Misused Words and Phrases



PRACTICAL TOOLS

Know the Language: 121 Confused and Misused Words and Phrases



When words sound exactly alike (or very close), it's easy to get them confused. Make sure you get these often-confused words right the first time.

114 words that are regularly confused and misused

accept, except

accept: to agree to receive or do

He accepted the salary offer in writing.

except: not including

The client agreed to everything on the contract except the start date.

adverse, averse

adverse: unfavorable, harmful

Taking on too many extra employees could have an adverse effect on company profits.

averse: strongly disliking; opposed

The manager was averse to letting employees know any more than they needed.

advice, advise

advice: recommendations about what to do

The administrative assistant took her boss' advice and lobbied for the promotion.

advise: to recommend something

We advise our employees to take advantage of new health savings accounts if they can.

affect, effect

affect: to change or make a difference to

The new department head wants to affect how the company uses her skills.

effect: (n): a result; (v): to bring about a result

The new regulations on corporate conduct had an instant effect on morale.

aisle, isle

aisle: a passage between rows of seats

People who were standing in the aisle blocked the way for several attendees to reach their seats.

isle: an island

The couple were planning a trip to a remote South Pacific isle.

all together, altogether

all together: all in one place, all at once

The office manager got the committee members all together to discuss the upcoming party.

altogether: completely; as a whole

Corporate headquarters has suggested scrapping the new project altogether.

aloud, allowed

aloud: out loud

The supervisor read the recommendations aloud to the entire team.

allowed: permitted

Each employee was allowed to respond to the recommendations when called on.

altar, alter

altar: a sacred table in a church

Flowers were bought to adorn the altar prior to the service.

alter: to change

Changes to the company's hiring practices were likely to alter compensation plans as well.

amoral, immoral

amoral: not concerned with right or wrong

The perpetrator showed an amoral affect during his questioning.

immoral: not following accepted moral standards

The judge determined that the criminal's actions were not only immoral, they were also illegal.

appraise, apprise

appraise: to assess

Our department heads will appraise the submitted budget and respond with proposed changes.

apprise: to inform someone

Please be apprised that the changes to the schedule refer to next year, not the current year.

assent, ascent

assent: agreement, approval

The employee assented to his manager's suggestion that he switch projects.

ascent: the action of rising or climbing up

No one was surprised by the new assistant director's ascent up the corporate ladder.

aural, oral

aural: relating to the ears or hearing

After falling, she reported both aural and visual damage.

oral: relating to the mouth; spoken

The marketing department chairman gave an oral presentation on the planned new products.

bare, bear

bare: (adj): naked; (v): to uncover

He had to watch where he stepped because his feet were bare.

bear: to carry; to put up with

His secretary said to bear in mind that he had two appointments the next morning.

bated, baited

bated: in great suspense; anticipation

With bated breath, the players on the bench watched the clock wind down.

baited: (adj): with bait attached or inserted; (v): lured

The manager refused to be baited into an argument with the CEO.

bazaar, bizarre

bazaar: a Middle Eastern market; an event where people sell goods

The church held its holiday bazaar for two consecutive weekends.

bizarre: strange, odd

Her bizarre behavior started to alarm some of her co-workers.

berth, birth

berth: a bunk in a ship, train, etc.

They agreed he would take the upper berth and she'd take the lower one.

birth: the emergence of a baby from the womb

My sister is due to give birth to a girl sometime next month.

born, borne

born: having started life

My cousin was born on the same day I was, four years apart.

borne: carried

Scientists suspect the virus was borne out of several foreign countries.

bough, bow

bough: a branch of a tree

A low-hanging bough had to be cut because it was hitting local power lines.

bow: (v): to bend the head; (n): the front of a ship

The speaker gave a little bow after receiving applause following the presentation.

brake, break

brake: (n): a device for stopping a vehicle; (v): to stop a vehicle

She held her foot on the brake because traffic was slowing down.

break: (v): to separate into pieces; (n): a pause

The employees were given a break to eat lunch outside.

beside, besides

beside: alongside

The manager gestured for the guest visitor to sit beside him while people arrived.

besides: in addition to

Besides setting deadlines, there were other duties the new hire had to master.

cannot, can not

cannot: unable

can not: incorrect spelling of "cannot"

We cannot allow gossip and innuendo to overtake the office.

canvas, canvass

canvas: a type of strong cloth

The oil-on-canvas painting featured a stark contrast in use of color.

canvass: to seek people's votes

The panel decided to canvass the neighbors to see if anyone objected to the new ordinance.

censure, censor

censure: to criticize strongly

The board decided to censure its treasurer for what it called "improper" behavior.

censor: (v): to ban parts of a book or film; (n): a person who does this

The agreement to censor what was released in the book was difficult to reach.

climactic, climatic

climactic: forming a climax

People sensed what might happen before the movie got to its climactic scene.

climatic: relating to climate

Some of the researchers didn't understand the climatic data.

complacent, complaisant

complacent: smug and self-satisfied

He said the new employee was a bit too complacent about his work.

complaisant: willing to please

The boss' assistant seemed overly complaisant despite all her duties.

complement, compliment

complement: (v): to add to; to improve; (n): an addition that improves something

The visuals were a nice complement to the rest of her presentation.

compliment: (v): to praise or express approval; (n): an admiring remark

He considered it a compliment that his boss has sought his approval.

continual, continuous

continual: often repeated, very frequent

The company had received continual complaints about the product.

continuous: uninterrupted

We couldn't hear over his continuous talking.

council, counsel

council: a group of people who manage or advise

The township manager met with the environmental council to work out a solution.

counsel: advice; to advise, (n) lawyer

I sought his counsel on the matter.

On the advice of his counsel, he decided not to testify.

coup, coupe

coup: an unplanned or hostile takeover

The move was considered a coup by the three department heads over the wishes of upper management.

coupe: a model of automobile

The remodeled two-seater 1959 Chevrolet coupe was considered quite rare.

corps, corpse

corps: a military regimen

The corps went through a series of maneuvers in front of the gathered crowd.

corpse: the body of a deceased person

The detectives cordoned off the area around the corpse so they could process the scene.

cue, queue

cue: a signal for action; a wooden rod

He felt the demotion was his cue to begin looking for another job.

queue: a line of people or vehicles

She was first in line in the queue, but still had to wait.

descent, decent, dissent

descent: downward movement

The plane began its descent in somewhat stormy weather.

decent: proper

She felt letting her co-worker know she'd gotten a promotion was the decent thing to do.

dissent: (v): to disagree; (n): disagreement

It was likely that more than a few employees would express dissent at the new rules.

disburse, disperse

disburse: to pay, distribute, scatter

They disbursed name tags to everyone attending the meeting.

disperse: to drive off, spread widely, cause to vanish.

The throng of fans dispersed into the stands.

elicit, illicit

elicit: draw forth

The manager's goal was to elicit ideas from his employees before taking the proposal to the next level.

illicit: illegal

Despite the charges, it wasn't clear whether the chairman had engaged in illicit activities.

e.g., i.e.

e.g.: Latin abbreviation for *exempli gratia*, meaning “for example”

Employees were encouraged to take all their personal items (e.g., coats, laptops, files) with them before the trip.

i.e.: Latin abbreviation for *id est*, meaning “in other words” or “that is”

The emergency drill was done to measure safety standards (i.e., to see that the building met fire codes).

envelop, envelope

envelop: to cover or surround

Clouds began to envelop the playing field, and spectators could hardly see the game.

envelope: a paper container for a letter

She sealed the envelope and remembered to put a stamp on it.

exercise, exorcise

exercise: physical activity; to do physical activity; to exert

He wished to exercise his right to take a week’s worth of vacation.

exorcise: to drive out an evil spirit

She believed the prayers would help her exorcise what she felt were demons.

farther, further

farther: refers to physical distance

The farther away he parked, the less congested the parking lot was.

further: refers to degree

Her bosses said they wanted to hear any further ideas she had about improving productivity.

fewer, less

fewer: countable items (e.g., shoes, people)

There were fewer people in the manager's conference meeting than were at the hotel bar.

less: quantity of either physical (e.g., salt, water) or non-physical (e.g., patience, ideas) things

She had less patience for adults than she did for children.

flounder, founder

flounder: to move clumsily; to have difficulty doing something

Just when he got to the end of the run, he began to flounder.

founder: to fail

The engine began to founder around three hours into the trip.

foreword, forward

foreword: an introduction to a book

The foreword of the text contained a list of the authors.

forward: onwards, ahead

The consensus was to move forward on the project even though there was no end date.

homing, honing

homing: to move or be aimed toward a destination or target

Missiles were quickly homing in on the targets.

honing: to sharpen or make more acute, as in honing a talent

He honed his negotiation skills to buy a new car at a reasonable price.

imply, infer

imply: to suggest

He implied that because the employee hadn't heard from the boss, he mustn't be angry.

infer: to speculate or deduce

Officials inferred that the pattern of phone calls constituted evidence of wrongdoing.

its, it's

its: pronoun showing possession

The company was exercising its right to set regulations on salary limits.

it's: contraction of "it is"

It's likely that the new CFO will hold a company-wide meeting on future strategy.

moral, morale

moral: a lesson learned

She felt the moral of the story was that it was best to keep a secret you promise to keep.

morale: an outlook or perspective, usually of a group

The administrative assistant hoped her awards gathering improved office morale.

perspective, prospective

perspective: viewpoint

From the employees' perspective, the move could only mean company downsizing.

prospective: probable, likely

After the merger, the company's next prospective move will be to assess personnel.

prescribe, proscribe

prescribe: to authorize use of medicine; to order authoritatively

The doctor went over possible contraindications before he'd prescribe a new medication.

proscribe: to officially forbid something

The order proscribed returning to the scene before more detectives arrived.

principal, principle

principal: (adj): essential or important; (n): person who has controlling authority

The principal conflict involved the time it would take to complete the project.

principle: a fundamental truth, rule or belief

She felt making the deal would violate their principles on ethics and behavior.

poured, pored

poured: to release from a container

She went around the table and poured water into everyone's glass.

pored: to review

The employees pored over book after book of similar advertisements.

regardless, irregardless

regardless: in spite of

We are leaving, regardless of whether you're ready.

irregardless: this is a misuse of "regardless"

stationary, stationery

stationary: not moving

The car, although it was in neutral gear, remained stationary.

stationery: writing materials

The office stationery had his name, address and phone number at the top.

supposedly, supposably

supposedly: according to what is believed

The ads were aimed at office managers, supposedly because they do the ordering.

supposably: a mispronunciation of "supposedly."

than, then,

than: preposition following a comparison

The meeting started much later than they thought it would.

then: refers to time, next

The office assistance got her boss some coffee, then went back to her desk for the files.

their, there, they're

their: (pronoun); belonging to them

The visiting executives couldn't locate their rental car.

there: in a place

She placed the report there so she'd remember to pick it up later.

they're: contraction of "they are"

The managers let the secretaries know they're headed out for lunch.

your, you're

your: belonging to you

Allow me to hang your coat in our lobby closet.

you're: contraction of "you are"

We understand if you're not planning to attend the entire conference.

whose, who's

whose: pronoun showing possession

Without reading the meeting minutes, it was unclear whose idea was the winning strategy.

who's: contraction of "who is"

No one knows exactly who's in charge of overseeing the next phase of the project.

7 commonly misused phrases

Called malapropisms (improper phrases) or homophones (words that sound alike but aren't), these words or phrases, when misused, make even the smartest executive sound amateurish. If you use them, make sure you get them right. Some top offenders are:

for all intents and purposes – not, for all intensive purposes

For all intents and purposes means “for all the reasons and all the outcomes.”

For all intensive purposes is a mispronunciation of “For all intents and purposes.”

one and the same – not one in the same

“One and the same” means that two things are alike. “One in the same” is meaningless.

deep-seated – not deep-seeded

This phrase means something is firmly fixed in place, not that it is planted deeply, as the latter implies.

should have/could have/would have – not should of/could of/would of

You need to pair a verb with another verb. Otherwise, people will think “of” what?

wreak havoc – not *wreck* havoc or *reek* havoc

To wreck havoc means to destroy havoc, which is the opposite of this phrase's meaning. When you wreak havoc, you're spreading chaos and destruction.

I couldn't care less – not *I could care less*

Saying you could care less about something makes the something more important than you think it is. After all, if you could care less about something, you're saying there are other, less important things you care about, which takes away the sting of your comment. By saying you couldn't care less, that means nothing else exists that matters less to you.

with *bated* breath – not with *baited* breath

Bated means "held up or holding in great suspense," while baited refers to something that was lured or has bait attached or inserted.