

HOMONYMS and other Frequently Confused Words

Homonym: a word that *sounds*  the same as another word, but possesses a *different*  *meaning*.

Commonly confused words:

Affect vs. Effect

Affect =

Verb: to influence

Ex. The movie **affected** her perception about the war.

Noun: feeling or emotion, especially made evident through body language

Ex. His **affect** suggested intense anger and frustration.

Effect=

Verb: to bring about (usually some sort of change)

Ex. The large number of accidents **effected** a change in the traffic pattern.

Noun: a consequence or result

Ex. Fatigue is an **effect** of stress.

All ready vs. Already

All ready= a phrase that means ‘to be prepared’

Ex. We are all ready to go to Disney World tomorrow!

Already= ‘beforehand,’ ‘previously,’ ‘prior to some specified time’

Ex. Brad and Angelina had **already** left for Africa when their agents received a call about a new movie deal.

= ‘now,’ ‘so soon’

Ex. I can’t believe it’s midnight **already**!

All right vs. Alright

All right= ‘satisfactory,’ ‘safe,’ or ‘all correct’

Ex. Ordering pizza tonight is **all right** with me!
I think my answers on the test were **all right**.

Alright = means the same thing as ‘all right,’ but is much more informal, and is not recommended for use in academic writing.

Ex. I guess that chair will look **alright** in the living room.

All together vs. Altogether

All together = ‘in a group’

Ex. The family was **all together** for Thanksgiving this year.



Altogether = ‘completely’ or ‘totally’

Ex. Lori **altogether** forgot about her dentist appointment this morning.

Definitely vs. Defiantly

Definitely= ‘positively,’ ‘absolutely’

Ex. James **definitely** needs to get rid of that ugly couch.

Defiantly= describes an action that is performed in a challenging or rebellious manner

Ex. Lisa **defiantly** walked out of class when the teacher told her to be quiet.

It’s vs. Its:

It’s = *it is*

Ex. **It’s** raining right now.

Its= possessive pronoun (shows ownership)

Ex. The car is due for **its** inspection.

Farther vs. Further

These words can usually be used interchangeably, but there are some general differences.

Farther= used to indicate physical distance or advancement

Ex. The bank is **farther** from our house than originally thought.

Further= used to indicate abstract distance or advancement (sometimes in regards to time)

Ex. The more I watch TV, the **further** behind I get in my studies.

Lie vs. Lay

Lie= verb that needs no direct object

Ex. I am going to **lie** down and take a nap.



Lay= verb that needs a direct object (i.e. you lay something down)

Ex. You can **lay** your books on the table.

(direct object)



To make it even more confusing, ‘lay’ is the past tense of lie. Here is a chart to help you remember this all!

Verb	Infinitive	Past Tense	Past Participle
lie	To lie	lay	lain (i.e. had lain)
lay	To lay	laid	laid (i.e. had laid)

Than vs. Then

Than= used as a conjunction to indicate comparison

Ex. She is much kinder **than** her brother.

Then= ‘next,’ ‘in that case’

Ex. **Then**, we decided to go to the park.

Ex. If you want to be a teacher, **then** you should volunteer at a school.

There vs. Their vs. They’re

There = indicates a position, place, or that something exists / can be seen

Ex. **There** are ten people in class today.

We are having the party over **there**.

Their = possessive pronoun (shows ownership)

Ex. **Their** new dog is adorable!

They’re = *they are*

Ex. Today, **they’re** going to the park.

(Hint: Unless you are indicating ownership or forming the contraction for ‘they are,’ you will use ‘there.’)

Threw vs. Through

Threw= the past tense of ‘throw’

Ex. Derek Jeter **threw** the ball to Robinson Cano.



Through= preposition that indicates passage from one point or boundary to the another

Ex. We drove **through** the mountains to get to the park.

(Hint: unless you are writing about the physical act of *throwing*, then ‘through’ is the correct form to use).

Who vs. Whom

Who= used for the subject case (performs an action in a sentence)

Ex. Do you know **who** is running in the race?

(i.e. *who runs*)

Whom= used for the object case (receives an action in a sentence)

Ex. To **whom** should I address the invitation?

(i.e. *address to whom*)

Who’s vs. Whose

Who’s= *who is*

Ex. Do you know **who’s** coming out with us tonight?

Whose= possessive pronoun (indicates ownership)

Ex. **Whose** dog is this?

You’re vs. Your

You’re = *you are*

Ex. We will watch the dog while **you’re** visiting your friend in California.

Your = possessive pronoun (shows ownership)

Ex. I saw **your** grandmother on her motorcycle today.

The following resource was used in the design of this handout:

Harris, Muriel. *Prentice Hall Reference Guide*. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006.

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